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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The effect of perceived organisational politics on organisational silence through organisational cynicism: Moderator role of perceived support

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of perceived organisational politics on organisational silence through the mediating role of organisational cynicism. In addition, it tests the effect of perceived support on this relationship. A quantitative (questionnaire survey) design was used to gather data from 346 employees in three public hospitals in Iraq. The structural equation model was used for data analysis. The results demonstrate that all the major hypotheses were accepted, and important role of perceived support in reversing the positive relationship between perceived organisational politics and organisational cynicism was also highlighted. Furthermore, the mediating role was clear in terms of organisational cynicism and the relationship between perceived organisational politics and organisational silence.

Keywords: perceived organisational politics; perceived support; organisational cynicism; organisational silence; public hospitals

Introduction

Although organisations and human resource management agree about the importance of open dialogue, studies highlight that, in practice, many employees doubt their organisations' support for mutual communication and the exchange of information, which consequently hampers the success of organisational goals and objectives (Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). One of the main obstacles to the success of such objectives is the lack of information, which is often referred as 'organisational silence'. This implies the suppression of ideas, opinions and information in relation to an organisation's problems and effectiveness (Morrison, 2014), which is a notoriously widespread phenomenon (Kanani, Enayati, Lari, & Sal, 2015). Thus, organisational silence has a negative influence on the ability of organisations to detect errors and learnings (Nafei, 2016). Furthermore, organisational silence has a negative influence on both the organisation and employees as it makes employees feel they are not important, are not in control and lose confidence (Liang & Wang, 2016). Therefore, it has become necessary for contemporary organisations to maintain and attract the human resources required to protect them from a culture of silence. This can be achieved by creating ideas, presenting views and having discussions that positively influence employees' performances (Ehtiyar & Yanardağ, 2008; Tabatabaei & Bigdelli, 2015). Hence, organisations can adopt a culture that encourages employees to voice concerns that enable these issues to be tackled as soon as possible. This is of particular importance in hospitals (Nafei, 2016; Çaylak & Altuntaş, 2017).

Another issue related with organisational silence is organisational cynicism, which is one of the most undesirable organisational phenomena. Organisational cynicism, although not a recent

phenomenon, has not been studied sufficiently by researchers (Tabatabaei & Bigdelli, 2015). Both organisational silence and organisational cynicism are factors that hinder the improvement of organisations, particularly in the health sector, because of the link between them and employees' attitudes and behaviours (Çaylak & Altuntaş, 2017). This is important as employees' views, ideas and the information they process are considered constructive means for the improvement of an organisation's work. In some cases, employees – individually or in groups – voice their ideas, views and information regarding issues and organisational problems. However, sometimes they suffer from a reluctant 'silence', which is a vaguer concept than organisational voice (Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003).

A number of theories address these issues. Perceived organisational politics is defined by the conservation of resources theory as the process of everyone trying to conserve resources and achieve the most from them in any possible way (Hobfoll, 2001). Perceived organisational politics deals a recognised phenomenon in organisations and can significantly affect employees' outcomes and beliefs (Delle, 2013), one of which is organisational silence (Liang & Wang, 2016). Social exchange theory (Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Lynch, 1998) and organisational support theory (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) also attempt to interpret employees' perceptions with regard to the commitment of the organisation in satisfying their needs. In addition, the employee may compare their experiences with what happened to their peers in similar circumstances. Perceived support for employees can have a significant impact on their beliefs, feelings and behaviour (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Riggle, Edmondson, & Hansen, 2009). The relationship between the organisation and employees is judged by the employees in terms of what they are offered and what they actually receive from the organisation (Fatima, Salah-Ud-Din, Khan, Hassan, & Hoti, 2015).

This study is important for two main reasons. First, many studies about the effect of perceived organisational politics on organisational silence have been undertaken in developed countries (e.g., Riggle, Edmondson, & Hansen, 2009; Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017). However, empirical investigations in developing countries are still limited, especially in relation to public hospitals (Nafei, 2016). Second, in addition to the variables included in previous studies, the current study includes the variables of organisational cynicism as a mediator and of perceived support as a moderator. Therefore, the current study aims to identify the effect of the mediating role of organisational cynicism in relation to perceived organisational politics on organisational silence. It endeavours to test the part played by perceived support (moderating role) through assessing the views of a sample of employees working in public hospitals. Thus, the conceptual framework of this study is based on the links formed between the three interconnected factors that are expected to arise, namely, perception, attitude and outcomes. These links were found in several studies, albeit using different variables (e.g., Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Tabatabaei & Bigdelli, 2015). The negative perception of the organisational phenomena, that is perceived organisational politics, tends to increase employees' negative attitudes towards organisational cynicism. Hence, this would increase the possible negative outcomes faced by an organisation regarding employees in terms of organisational silence. Thus, this study hypothesises that the effect of positive perceived support will reduce the negative perceptions of organisational politics.

Theory and hypotheses

Perceived organisational policies

The conservation of resources theory accounts for organisational politics by explaining that individuals attempt to conserve valuable resources (material or moral) and these individuals also attempt to exert control over them (Hobfoll, 2001). Most organisations have limited resources in different areas; therefore, this is likely to increase the occurrence of behaviours and activities aimed at achieving the conservation of resources which, in turn, give value to those controlling

them (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). Perceived organisational politics is defined as the behaviours and actions that happen informally inside an organisation and encompasses individuals' actions aimed at supporting their private interests, which may agree or disagree with other individuals' interests (Mintzberg, 1983; Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Bukhari & Kamal, 2015). It refers to behaviour in which personal interests are more important than those of the organisation (Malik, Danish, & Ghafoor, 2009). Furthermore, perceived organisational politics is the degree to which individuals view their work environment as a political one, which is characterised by injustice (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Zivnuska, Kacmar, Witt, Carlson, & Bratton, 2004). Thus, determining the degree to which politics is promoted within the organisation can relate to employees' perception of it (Zivnuska et al., 2004) demonstrating that employees' perceptions of the political attitude of the organisation is very important (Zivnuska et al., 2004; Mathur, Nathani, & Dubey, 2013; Yilmaz, 2014).

Perceived organisational politics can be classified into two types. The first is the motivational motive which increases employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment and reduces the turnover of employees. In contrast, the punishment motive notably decreases employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment and encourages them to quit the organisation (Sogra, Shahid, & Najibullah, 2009). Despite the difficulty in evaluating political attitudes, most employees directly or indirectly perceive a political event regardless of how a company attempts to represent it. Thus, this could facilitate the measurement of the political attitude either way (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997).

Over the past few years, organisational politics have become a significant area of study of the influential factors and ways in which organisations are run (Bodla, Afza, & Danish, 2015; Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016). In this context, perception, recognition and group acceptance of political activities can be influential and determining factors in terms of the nature the organisational culture (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). In addition, political attitude is able to impact upon numerous functional results and sometimes results in confusion at both individual and group levels, on whether the perception is positive or negative to the organisation (Mathur, Nathani, & Dubey, 2013; Arogundade, Arogundade, & Gbabijo, 2016). Moreover, it must be noted that the organisational politics are directionally associated with negative phenomena, including job stress, fatigue, absenteeism, organisational silence and work adverse behaviours (Goodman, Evans, & Carson, 2011; Bedi & Schat, 2013; Abbas, Raja, Darr, & Bouckenoghe, 2014; Arogundade, Arogundade, & Gbabijo, 2016; Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016). It is also inversely related to the positive phenomena at both the individual and organisational levels. These phenomena are represented by factors, such as organisational co-working behaviour, commitment, trust, organisational fairness, performance, job satisfaction and job engagement (Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999; Malik, Danish, & Ghafoor, 2009; Bedi & Schat, 2013; Delle, 2013; Karatepe, 2013; Meisler & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014).

Ferris and Kacmar (1992) proposed that perceived organisational politics can be specifically measured in relation to three factors: general political behaviour, go along to get ahead, and pay and promotion policies. (1) *General political behaviour* refers to the behaviour development addressed to obtain private interests. This could arise from unclear rules regarding general conduct. Therefore, it makes those who deal skilfully with individuals and situations winners at the expenses of others (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997; Yilmaz, 2014). (2) *Go along to get ahead* refers to individuals who wish to avoid conflict, and therefore, do not oppose other attempts at influence. These individuals are not viewed as a threatening adversary by those who act politically; thus, go along to get ahead (lack of action) is an appropriate and profitable policy to take in order to advance one's own self-interests, particularly when working in a political environment (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). (3) *Pay and promotion policies* involves the organisation's political action in terms of the enactment of rules regarding promotions (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). The stated rules may encourage particular individuals to exhibit political behaviour, such as when rewards are granted to only certain people, which can trigger

disappointment in others and, consequently, cause them to resort to political behaviour (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997).

Organisational cynicism

The concept of cynicism dates back at least to 400 BCE, when Athenians were cynical about politicians' monopolistic control over wealth (Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005). Since 1990, this concept has been developed and used in many areas, such as sociology, psychology and administration (Qian & Daniels, 2008). In general, cynicism refers to a predominate pessimism within society and the business environment. Within organisations, organisational cynicism refers to employees' negative attitudes towards their organisations (Tabatabaei & Bigdelli, 2015). Moreover, organisational cynicism is connected with negative effects such as carelessness, resignation, alienation, despair, distrust, disdain, uncertainty, disappointment, personal conflict, poor performance, absenteeism and fatigue (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998; Abraham, 2000).

Furthermore, the use of cynicism is considered to be self-defensive. For those who embrace it, it is a means of changing their undesirable situation, which may be caused by corrupt and unfair circumstances within the working environment. These, consequently, have a negative impact on the employee's prospects (Cole, Bruch, & Vogel, 2006; Naus, 2007). Thus, cynicism could have huge impacts on the individual and organisation (Naus, Van Iterson, & Roe, 2007). Although employee cynicism can appear to be a simple thing, it can greatly contribute to overall organisational cynicism and, thus, administrative interventions and the creation or enactment of policies and new practices can be targeted as a result (Naus, 2007). As argued by Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar (1998), organisational cynicism is negative for an organisation for the following reasons: (1) There is a belief that the organisation lacks integrity. (2) Employees' possess negative impressions of the organisation. (3) The inclination to be critical and rude against the organisation. Moreover, according to (Mathur, Nathani, & Dubey, 2013), organisational cynicism tends to lead to negative predictions regarding organisational and administrative initiatives, with it being expressed in many forms, for instance complaining, joking, secret comments, swearwords, winking and destructive hints. However, these can be reduced by actions, such as open and honest communication.

Although some earlier researchers have addressed the concept of organisational cynicism as a one-dimensional construct (e.g., Andersson, 1996; Andersson & Bateman, 1997), the current research tackles cynicism as a multidimensional conceptual construct (e.g., Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998; Brandes, Dharwadkar, & Dean, 1999; Proefschrift, 2007; Ince & Turan, 2011). For example, Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar (1998) used the traditional three-dimensional construct. This involves the belief dimension that is reflected in the employees' cognitive evaluations regarding their organisation's integrity and honesty; the emotional dimension that is reflected in their negative feelings and the behaviour dimension, which is reflected in significant behaviours regarding organisational cynicism. In addition, Nafei (2013) developed a conceptual framework about organisational cynicism which includes: (1) belief or cognition, which is the key dimension of organisational cynicism. It refers to the employees' belief that an organisation is lacking the credibility and consistency (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998). When employees believe that the organisation's practices are not just and honest, they adopt unprincipled actions and immoral attitudes as if they are norms. In addition, cynics may believe that human beings in general are untrustworthy and incoherent in their behaviours (Brandes, Dharwadkar, & Dean, 1999; Proefschrift, 2007; Ince & Turan, 2011). (2) Emotional or affect, which is the second dimension, referring to the formation of emotional responses arising from employees' realisation that their expectations and wishes, such as integrity and credibility, have not been achieved as a part of the organisation's commitments (Proefschrift, 2007; Ince & Turan, 2011). Therefore, cynicism against an organisation may carry with it powerful emotional responses, including

anxiety, nervousness and disdain (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998; Brandes, Dharwadkar, & Dean, 1999). (3) Behaviour, which represents the negative tendency to recognise the organisation's strengths, value and importance (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998). These negative attitudes to an organisation's tangible and intangible elements may be expressed implicitly or explicitly and are an outcome of the negative beliefs and impressions employees feel towards an organisation (Brandes, Dharwadkar, & Dean, 1999; Proefschrift, 2007; Kutanis & Cetinel, 2010).

Perceived organisational politics and organisational cynicism

It is very important to acknowledge the cognitive and emotional responses to the perceived political environment of an organisation (Davis & Gardner, 2004). This idea is supported by the reasons for the importance of measuring the perceived rather than the actual politics, as proposed by Ferris and Kacmar (1992). The reasons include: (1) measurement of perceived politics being much easier than that of actual behaviour; (2) perceived politics represents the actual fact and, thus, they are more expressive of people's views, attitudes and behaviours and (3) perceived politics are more influential in terms of employees' views and behaviours than the actual politics. Therefore, employees' perceptions that decisions and procedures which have been taken are unfair, or are deceptive or self-serving for the organisation lead them to being cynical (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998). In other words, an employee using cynicism can be simply experiencing a defensive reaction against a feeling of psychological threat or injustice (Cole, Bruch, & Vogel, 2006). Since organisational politics are an unwanted aspect within the organisational environment, employees being part of the environment are more likely to respond with cynicism (Davis & Gardner, 2004). In addition, perceived organisational politics are one of the factors that obstruct employees' positive organisational behaviour (Bukhari & Kamal, 2015). Moreover, Goodman, Evans, and Carson (2011) emphasise that organisational politics could have an effect on organisational and individual results in the sense that it alters situations and behaviours. Furthermore, influenced by the understanding and assessment of the degree of self-interest behaviour of other employees in the organisation, perception of organisational politics has been proved to have a significant influence on the attitude and behaviour of employees (Rong & Cao, 2015). Meanwhile, Kiewitz, Restubog, Zagenczyk, and Hochwarter (2009) argue that employees' perceptions of organisational politics serve as an indicator for the overall charitable or malignant character of the organisation and their agents. These findings support Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1: Perceived organisational politics will be positively related to organisational cynicism.

Organisational silence

Organisational silence is not necessarily viewed as contradictory to organisational voice. Silence happens either when people do not have relevant ideas; information and opinions or they refuse to share information, opinions and views (Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). People usually keep silent to avoid confrontation, potential disagreements and perceived dangers (Ehtiyar & Yanardağ, 2008). The main characteristic that differentiates silence and voice is not the presence or absence of speaking up, but the individual's motivation to withhold rather than express ideas, information and opinions about the business environment. Therefore, there are three specific employee motives: disengaged behaviour based on resignation, self-protective behaviour based on fear and other oriented behaviour based on cooperation (Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Organisational silence can be characterised in two ways: first, it is focussed on collective-level dynamics; and second, it is focussed on why employees usually prefer to be silent, rather than on why they do not choose to speak-up (Nafei, 2016). In this regard, Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) define three vital points associated with organisational silence. First, the absence of a voice does not translate as the existence of organisational silence. Second, it does not include

cases of reckless behaviour, which are not related to conscious decision-making. Third, it considers work-related issues that contribute to its improvement.

Organisational silence takes various forms, such as collective silence at meetings, low-level participation in discussions and low level of collective voice (Ehtiyar & Yanardağ, 2008). Therefore, the current study focusses on these forms. Furthermore, Nafei (2016) highlights the five factors that influence organisational silence. The factors are: (1) top management support for silence owing to their fears of negative reactions or because of managers' underlying beliefs; (2) chances for communication are unavailable; (3) supervisors' encouragement of silence; (4) formal authority and (5) employees' fears of negative reactions. Meanwhile, Ehtiyar and Yanardağ (2008) believe that management encourages organisational silence because: (1) managers think that information raised by their subordinates could be threatening to their position, thus they ignore it, depreciate it or even doubt its credibility; (2) managers think employees when expressing their views, do not consider others' interests and top management is the only authority able to do so; and (3) the underlying and unprecedented belief that unanimity is an indicator of organisational soundness. Therefore, it is thought better to avoid conflicting views.

Silence can also be classified according to the incentives for using it into: (1) behaving in a negative way with no participation or agreement on anything because of the feeling of inability to change precautionary behaviour; (2) premeditated behaviour, which involve self-defending and relies on the feeling of fear; (3) orientation towards others, thus relying on cooperation with other people and preference (Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). The first incentive represents *acquiescent silence*, which relies on non-engagement in discussion and the exchange of views and information due to the belief that change is unlikely to happen. The second incentive represents the *defensive (quiescent) silence*, which refuses to present conscious information, ideas and opinions; it is concerned with self-defence and is considered the best strategy in this context. The third incentive, the *pro-social silence*, is concerned with rational behaviour, hence it is not dictated by the organisation. It includes the withholding of ideas, opinions and information concerning work. It aims to support other people and the organisation's interests and advantages, based on the concepts of preference and cooperation (Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003).

Perceived organisational politics and organisational silence

Generally, organisational politics are not desired by employees; however, managers and supervisors use their political skills to keep things working, and employees can perceive it negatively. They think that it is based on personal interest and tolerance, which leads to employees showing negative responses (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009). Furthermore, perceived organisational politics can have an effect on various processes, relationships and behaviours (Bodla, Afza, & Danish, 2014). Political behaviours are the means by which personal interests and status can be met. Thus, an imbalance in employees' positions and attitudes is likely to happen as a result (Yilmaz, 2014). Liang and Wang (2016) inferred that organisational politics is one factor contributing to the formation of organisational silence, particularly in state-owned enterprises. In other words, perceived organisational politics is believed to have a positive effect on organisational silence. This supports the study Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived organisational politics will be positively related to organisational silence.

The mediating role of organisational cynicism and organisational silence

Organisational cynicism can be defined as 'a negative attitude toward one's employing organisation, comprising three dimensions: (1) a *belief* that the organisation lacks integrity; (2) negative *affect* toward the organisation; and (3) tendencies to disparaging and critical *behavior* toward the organisation that are consistent with these beliefs and affect' (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar,

1998). Since verbal, intellectual and physical behaviours form an indicator of organisational silence (Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003), employees tend to resort to their intellect, belief and behaviours in order to cover up their ideas and opinions when they feel they are invaluable (Ehtiyar & Yanardağ, 2008). Organisational silence is considered a normal response from employees who are cynical with regard to their organisations (Çaylak & Altuntaş, 2017). However, although research indicates that cynicism may lead to negative results for employees, cynical employees are often silent (Tabatabaei & Bigdelli, 2015). Moreover, organisations need to ensure that employees must be encouraged to present ideas and views. However, organisational silence has become widespread across modern organisations and has subsequently become a critical issue for managers. Hence, it is important to identify the actual reasons and motives behind such behaviours (Yu & Ye, 2015). In this context, Chang, Rosen, and Levy (2009) highlight a negative relationship between employee perception of self-serving, illegitimate political activities at work and their behaviour and attitudes. This supports Yu and Ye (2015) and Tabatabaei and Bigdelli (2015) claims that there is mediating role for organisational cynicism in relation to the moral climax (or fairness) and organisational silence. Consequently, this study investigates the role of organisational cynicism as a mediator with regard to the relationship between the perceived organisational politics and organisational silence. This leads to two further hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Organisational cynicism will be positively related to organisational silence.

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between perceived organisational politics and organisational silence will be mediated by organisational cynicism.

Perceived support

Interest in the concept of support in relation to employees inside their organisations has been increasing. It is linked with employees' views regarding how the organisation evaluates their work, contributions and prospects and, further, how it affects the important outcomes at an individual level (employees) and at a group level (organisation) (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Ambrose & Schminke, 2003). According to organisational support theory, an organisation is committed to satisfying their employees' requirements, such as their social, emotional and financial needs. These can be assessed by employees using three main factors: justice, supervisor's support, and organisational rewards and appropriate working conditions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Pay rises and treating employees respectfully are also recommended (Bukhari & Kamal, 2015). Honesty and trustworthiness, which serve as precedents (Kurtessis et al., 2017), are also important factors in terms of the perceived support (Bukhari & Kamal, 2015). Moreover, employees' past experience plays a part in this area (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997) because employees' past experiences, such as whether they had a connection with their current managers or organisation, are an organisational concern (Armeli et al., 1998; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Thus, perceived support can be defined as the employees' overall impression regarding the extent to which the organisation considers their contributions and efforts (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Based on the self-enhancement and social exchange-related hypotheses, perceived support is supposed to meet the employees' social, emotional, attribute and pertinence needs.

Employees' positive perceptions of the support offered by organisations could seemingly provide the organisation with the necessary protection and stability (Daskin & Tezer, 2012), since support can improve employees' impressions of the organisation (Kurtessis et al., 2017). As a result, a decrease in support for employees may cause employees to meet others' interests at the expense of their organisation's interests (Riggle, Edmondson, & Hansen, 2009). However, despite attempts made by some organisations to improve their employees' perceptions, obstacles still remain, such as long-term supervision, assumptive work teams and shortages in resources (Aubé, Rousseau, & Morin, 2007). Moreover, Ambrose and Schminke (2003) stress that organisational

support is affected by one of the organisation's contextual factors, organisational structure. Ambrose and Schminke (2003) emphasise that it is the procedures of the mechanical structures that are used to define support, whereas human interactions are the best for defining support for individuals.

Although researchers, such as Eisenberger et al. (1986), use perceived support as a one-dimensional variable, others, including Howes, Cropanzano, Grandey, and Mohler (2000), use two dimensions: individual-support and team-support. Furthermore, perceived support is normally divided into perceived supervisor support and perceived organisational support (Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010). This study uses the latter in which perceived organisational support refers to the employee's perceptions of material or abstract support offered by the organisation in response to employees' efforts (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Aubé, Rousseau, & Morin, 2007). Hence, this is used as a justification for employees' agreement or disagreement with the organisation's position. Employees, therefore, think their agreement will ensure their demands are met (Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010). Perceived supervisor support refers to a supervisor's degree of interest in employees' concerns, demands, emotions and career development (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Ambrose & Schminke, 2003). Supervisor's support is considered to be the main influence as employees' perceptions are primarily gathered from bosses and thereafter from the organisation as a whole (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Ambrose & Schminke, 2003; Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010).

The moderating role of perceived support

Both perceived organisational politics and perceived support touch on many aspects of the business environment, including morale, stress, withdrawal and antagonistic behaviours (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997). Also, they have a significant influence on what employees think about their job, such as satisfaction, turnover intentions and active commitment (Randall et al., 1999). According to Riggle, Edmondson, and Hansen (2009), perceived organisational support has a positive effect on job satisfaction and organisational commitment and a moderate positive effect on employee performance. Politics and support are often viewed as contradicting terms, but they may actually have similar objectives when examined more closely. For example, some people tend to join groups and teams where organisational policies are practiced in order to obtain rewards and resources. Therefore, they feel they are in a supportive environment (Cropanzano et al., 1997). Nevertheless, the existence of a supportive organisational environment does not mean the absence of organisational politics and the absence of organisational politics does not mean the availability of a supportive organisational environment (Cropanzano, Kacmar, & Bozeman, 1995; Randall et al., 1999).

A high level of perceived support can motivate employees to give up personal goals, and thus, the organisation's interests may be prioritised (Witt & Carlson, 2006). In this regard, Krongboonying and Lin (2015) argue that perceived support by employees may undermine the negative effect of the perceived organisational politics in terms of the employees' positive effect of being devoted to the organisation. An increase in employee support may actually help employees become more satisfied with the support offered by their organisations (Ellen, Ferris, & Buckley, 2013). Thus, it is an important factor in relation to the positive results of organisations, especially those with high organisational politics (Bukhari & Kamal, 2015). Thus, the perceived support effect is positively related to perceived organisational politics (Hochwarter, Kacmar, Perrewe, & Johnson, 2003; Daskin & Tezer, 2012; Bukhari & Kamal, 2015). Meanwhile, perceived support has been shown to have a negative impact on organisational cynicism (Cole, Bruch, & Vogel, 2006; Özgür, 2015). This is because it is the perceived support that determines employee's attitudes towards an organisation (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Overall, Interligi and Albrecht (2006) and Rong and Cao (2015) emphasise that organisational and supervisors' support play an important role in the effect of perceived organisational politics. This claim underpins the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: The greater the perceived support, the weaker the positive relationship between perceived organisational politics and organisational cynicism.

The comprehensive conceptual framework model of study to establish relationship among the study variables is presented in Figure 1.

Method

Research design

The current study is based on a quantitative approach, which relies on the deductive approach for the examination of the relationship between theory and research, seeking to test the theories embedded within a logical framework or social context (Creswell, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2011). The study methodology is descriptive, allowing for a particular problem to be examined, with the relevant information described using the testing of hypotheses, which attempt to explain the nature of relationships among two or more variables. The descriptive approach is usually conducted when organisations are aware of the problem but lack certain knowledge (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2010).

The population, sample and data collection methods

The population of study consists of employees in the health sector in Iraq, namely in the biggest three public hospitals that have around 3,455 employees. The sample consists of randomly selected employees, because employees' perceptions about organisational politics and organisational silence vary across the organisation (Abbas et al., 2014). It has been found that employees witness organisational issues more often than do managers; however, they prefer to remain silent because of fear of being penalised (Morrison, 2014). A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, and 346 were returned giving a 77% response rate. Table 1 illustrates the demographic and professional characteristics of the respondents. The study used questionnaires to collect the required data. Several multi-option questions were used to obtain the responses. The final questionnaire included 54 items that covered the four key variables – perceived organisational politics, perceived support, organisational cynicism and organisational silence, each with between 11 and 15 dimensions. All items in the questionnaire were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 5 = 'strongly agree').

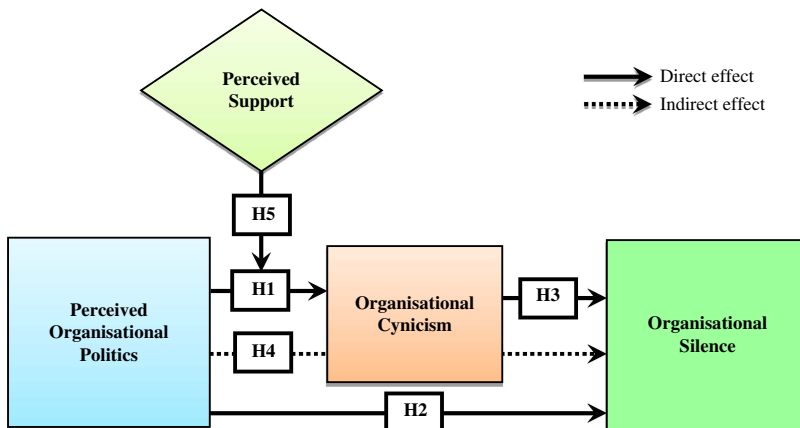


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Table 1. Demographic and professional characteristic of respondents

	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Job title	Physicians	85	24.50
	Nurses	151	43.64
	Administrative staff	110	31.86
	Total	346	100.00
Gender	Male	220	63.50
	Female	144	36.50
	Total	346	100.00
Age	<20	30	8.67
	20 to <30	65	18.78
	30 to <40	84	24.28
	40 to <50	70	20.27
	50 or more	97	28.00
	Total	346	100.00
Educational level	Secondary school	145	41.90
	Diploma	67	19.37
	Bachelor	84	24.28
	Master and PhD	50	14.45
	Total	346	100
Years of experience	<5 years	60	17.34
	5–10	100	28.90
	>10	186	53.76
	Total	346	100.00

Measures

Perceived organisational politics: The perceived organisational politics measure followed the dimensions used by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). It consists of 15 items subdivided as follows: two items assigned for the general political dimension, seven items for the go-ahead dimension and six items for the payment and promotion policies dimension.

Perceived support: This standard was used by Eisenberger et al. (1986, 2002) and Dawley, Houghton, and Bucklew (2010). It consists of 11 items and was subdivided based on Dawley, Houghton, and Bucklew (2010) into eight items for perceived organisational support and three items for perceived supervisor's support.

Organisational cynicism: This standard was used by Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar (1998) and Brandes, Dharwadkar, and Dean (1999). It consists of 13 items: five items for belief and four each for emotion and behaviour.

Organisational silence: This standard was used by Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003). It consists of 15 items: five items each are devoted to quiescence silence, defensive silence and social positive silence.

Table 2. Results from the one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test

	Perceived support	Perceived organisational politics	Organisational cynicism	Organisational silence
<i>N</i>	346	346	346	346
Kolmogorov–Smirnov <i>Z</i>	0.563	0.662	0.742	0.673
Asymp. sig. (two-tailed)	0.661	0.785	0.566	0.465

Table 3. Cronbach's α and composite reliability values of scales

Measure	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Perceived support	0.86	0.90	0.87
Perceived organisational politics	0.76	0.81	0.78
Organisational cynicism	0.81	0.86	0.82
Organisational silence	0.79	0.82	0.80

Data analysis

Statistical techniques were used for the description and analysis of the study variables and to test the hypotheses. These techniques relied on SPSS V.22 and AMOS V.22. Cronbach's α was also used to ensure the measures' reliability, the model's fit and the model's validity, alongside Pearson's correlation to establish the correlation coefficient among variables, a path analysis to check the effect of the hypotheses on mediator variable, and lastly, a hierarchical regression to check the effect of the hypotheses on the moderator variable.

Results

Normality test

In order to assess the assumed normality, a one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K–S) test was performed. The results (see Table 2) from the K–S test reports a non-significant result ($p > .05$), indicating normality (Pallant, 2011).

Reliability and assessing the model fit

Cronbach's α and the construct-level reliability (composite reliability) were used to check internal consistency to measure the reliability of each measure (Sekaran, 2003; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Pallant, 2011). In addition, the average variance extracted was used to assess the convergent validity of each dimension (Hair et al., 2010). As can be seen from Table 3, the Cronbach's α composite reliability values of all measures are higher than 0.70, thus demonstrating adequate internal consistency. Also, the average variance extracted for each construct ranged from 0.78 to 0.87, which indicates adequate construct convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010; Pallant, 2011). Thus, the results show good discriminant validity for each measure.

After examining the reliability and validity for each measure, a two-step model approach to structural equation modelling was used. It involved evaluating the measurement models followed by evaluating the structure model (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2011). Confirmatory factor analysis was used to evaluate the measures of the conceptual framework of this study using AMOS V.22. Table 4 summarises the fit result for all four measures.

Table 4. Assessing the models' fit

Models	$\chi^2/\text{d.f.}$	CFI	NFI	GFI	RMSEA
Model 1	5.21	0.48	0.40	0.35	0.23
Model 2	4.13	0.59	0.49	0.45	0.17
Model 3	3.06	0.71	0.68	0.62	0.12
Model 4	1.50	0.97	0.94	0.92	0.07

Table 5. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient between variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Perceived support	2.96	1.15				
Perceived organisational politics	3.05	0.87	-0.578**			
Organisational cynicism	2.87	0.93	-0.651**	0.600**		
Organisational silence	2.94	0.90	-0.658**	0.605**	0.662**	

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

As can be seen in Table 4, Model 1 (single factor) was tested first so that all measures were exerted to one latent factor. This result was reached: $\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 5.21$; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.48; normal fit index (NFI) = 0.40; goodness-of-fit (GFI) = 0.35; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.23. Model 2 (two-factors) was then tested. Perceived support was considered the first latent factor and other factors were designated to the second latent factor. The following results were obtained: $\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 4.13$; CFI = 0.59; NFI = 0.49; GFI = 0.45; RMSEA = 0.17. Subsequently, Model 3 (three factors) was tested, and perceived support was again considered to be the first latent factor, perceived organisational politics as second latent factor, while the third latent factor included organisational silence and cynicism. The following results were obtained: $\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 3.06$; CFI = 0.71; NFI = 0.68; GFI = 0.62; RMSEA = 0.12. Finally, Model 4 (four factors) was tested, in which all measures were separately associated with latent factors. The following results were obtained: $\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 1.50$; CFI = 0.97; NFI = 0.94; GFI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.07. Thus, it appears that the indicators of the four-factor model were accepted. This model was characterised by the constructs and discriminant validity, as well as containing the best data for this study's sample (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2011). In addition, the findings show that all relationships between the indicator variables and the latent variables were statistically significant.

Hypotheses tests

Table 5 illustrates the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient between the four variables of the study. The mean value ranges from 2.87 to 3.05 and standard deviation from 0.87 to 1.15. The correlations among the study variables model are significant at the 0.01 level. Hence, this offers primary support with regard to the study's main hypotheses.

For the testing of the study's hypotheses, a path analysis was used, which was included in AMOS, V.22. Figure 2 and Table 5 show the results.

According to Table 6, all direct and indirect effect hypotheses (H1, H2, H3 and H4) were accepted. The Sobel test is a suitable method to test individual mediating effects (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Therefore, the Sobel test was used to identify test data for Hypothesis 4 (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The results show there is a partial mediating role of organisational cynicism in the relationship between perceived organisational politics and organisational silence.

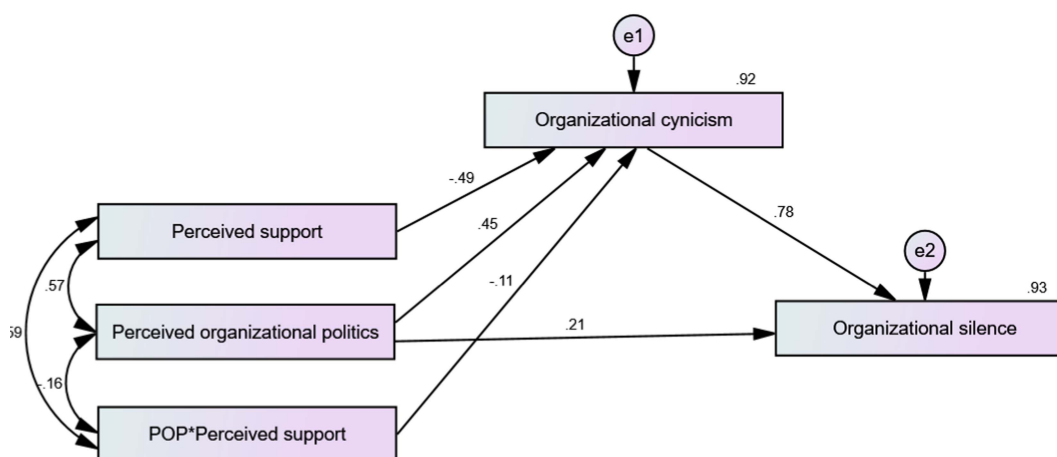


Figure 2. Testing of the main hypotheses of the study. Source: AMOS, V.22 program outputs

Table 6. Test hypotheses

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
POP → Organisational cynicism	0.452	0.093	5.149	***
POP → Organisational silence	0.207	0.036	6.648	***
Organisational cynicism → Organisational silence	0.776	0.034	24.959	***
Perceived support → Organisational cynicism	-0.491	0.087	-4.567	***
POP*Perceived support → Organisational cynicism	-0.106	0.025	-2.026	0.042
POP → OC → OS	0.350	0.073	4.753	***

Source: AMOS, V.22 program outputs.

Table 7. Test the perceived support as a moderating variable

Variables	Organisational cynicism				
	R^2	$R^2\Delta$	β	t	Sig.
POP	0.360	–	0.452	5.149	0.000
Perceived support	0.422	0.062	-0.491	-4.567	0.000
POP*Perceived support	0.490	0.068	-0.106	-2.026	0.042

In relation to the Hypothesis 5 test, a moderating effect of perceived support is shown in relation to perceived organisational politics on organisational cynicism. In addition, the hierarchical regression analysis was used to ensure the moderator's role. First, the independent variable (perceived organisational politics) was added, after which the amended variable (perceived support) was added, and finally, the factor resulting from the interaction of the two variables was added. Table 7 shows the results.

As Table 7 shows, perceived organisational politics explains 36% of the changes which occurred in relation to organisational cynicism, while the effect of adding the amended variable and its reaction alongside perceived organisational politics implies 49% of changes occurred with

regard to organisational cynicism (a 13% difference). It also appears to have had an effect between perceived organisational politics and organisational cynicism, causing a negative effect. This may be due to the positive reverse effect between perceived support and organisational cynicism. Therefore, Hypothesis 5, the moderating effect of perceived support on the perceived organisational politics, can be accepted.

Discussion

Throughout this paper, efforts are made to determine the impacts of perceived organisational politics, which is interpreted by resource preservation theory as the act of hiding ideas, information and opinions through the use of organisational silence. How this happens, through the mediating influence of organisational cynicism as a response to a highly political organisational environment is also discussed. Moreover, attempts were made to identify the effect of employees' perceived support, which is interpreted by the theories of social exchange and organisational support as related to employees' perceptions of organisational politics. The sample population was drawn from three public hospitals in Iraq. Five hypotheses, derived from previous studies (Interligi & Albrecht, 2006; Rong & Cao, 2015; Tabatabaei & Bigdelli, 2015; Yu & Ye, 2015), were tested. The first hypothesis is concerned with the positive relationship between perceived organisational politics and organisational cynicism. An initial indication of the relationship was gained through using a Pearson correlation which showed a strong correlation (0.6000 at the level $p < .01$) between the two variables, perceived organisational politics and organisational cynicism. The β -estimate of 0.452 shown in Table 6 indicates that perceived organisational politics has a positive influence on organisational cynicism in the public healthcare sector in Iraq. This finding is consistent with Davis and Gardner (2004), who examine how perceived politics and organisational cynicism emerge from close versus distant leader–member relationships. Their study finds a positive relationship between perceived organisational politics and organisational cynicism. They believe that the leader–member attribution process represents a critical factor that impacts perceived political behaviour and organisation cynicism. The leader makes attributions regarding member performance who respond accordingly. These attributions impact the nature of the exchange relationship, as proposed by Dienesch and Liden (1986), and, as this study proves, affects member perceptions of politics and organisational cynicism.

The second hypothesis of this study examines the effect of perceived organisational politics on organisational silence. Table 5 shows a positive correlation between perceived organisational politics and organisational silence of 0.605 at the level $p < .01$. In addition, the structural equation modelling analysis shows that perceived organisational politics has a positive influence on organisational silence on those who work in the public hospitals in Iraq, especially managers who play a double role of politics and management. This is consistent with the findings of Liang and Wang (2016) that the perception of organisational politics partially plays an intermediary role in the formation mechanism of organisational silence. According to Liang and Wang (2016), employees decide to remain silent when they are faced with serious problems. This is because they are worried about the negative impact on themselves brought about by making suggestions. Therefore, when the relationship between employees and managers is distant, employees tend to be towards silence. However, when the relationship between employees and their managers is closer, and even goes beyond that set out in the employment contract, the employees are more willing to put forward their opinions on problems in the organisation and provide constructive comments.

The third hypothesis examines the relationship between organisational cynicism and organisational silence. According to the results shown in Table 5, the correlation between organisational cynicism and organisational silence was 0.662 at the level $p < .01$, while the β -estimate in Table 6 shows a positive relationship between organisational cynicism (belief, emotion and behaviour) and organisational silence (quiescence, defensive and social). These results support

the findings of Çaylak and Altuntaş (2017) who examined the relationship between the organisational silence, organisational cynicism and intention to leave work in university hospitals. Their results show that behavioural cynicism increases when employees remain silent on issues about ethics and responsibilities, employee performance and improvement efforts, particularly when employees feel there is a lack of justice, honesty and sincerity in their workplace and that personal interests unfairly influence the decision-making processes. The fourth hypothesis is related to the mediating role of organisational cynicism on perceived organisational support's influence on organisational silence. The results show organisational cynicism has a significant mediating role in this case. In other words, the effect of perceived organisational politics on organisational silence is made clearer through organisational cynicism. According to Yu and Ye (2015), cynicism partially mediated the relationship between instrumental ethical climate and employee's silence behaviour. Therefore, managers should take into consideration promoting strong positive relations among employees themselves and between management and employees as this encourages employees to speak up.

Finally, the fifth hypothesis examines the moderating role of perceived support to weaken the direct positive relationship between perceived organisational politics and organisational cynicism. The results of this study found perceived support plays a significant role in reversing the positive effect of perceived organisational politics on organisational cynicism. Perceived organisational support for employees can reduce the employees' attention paid to negative behaviours and activities and encourage them to embrace organisational interests over the interests of themselves and others. Thus, their negative impressions of perceived support are liable to weaken the organisation while positive impressions are likely to strengthen as an organisation–employee mutually reinforceable relationship arises. The results of this study are consistent with studies such as Rong and Cao (2015) who conclude that perceived organisation support as a moderating variable plays a significant role in the relationship between perceptions of organisational politics and employees' organisational commitment in such a way that the relationship would be weakened for those with higher perceived organisational support.

Theoretical implications

There is obvious importance for organisations in gaining an understanding of the behaviour of employees. For instance, Ferris, Frink, Galang, Zhou, Kacmar, and Howard (1996) claim that the perception of individuals with an ability to deal with political dynamics is less negative than that of individuals without such ability. Often, managers concentrate their attention on work procedures and ignore the employee perception issue. Furthermore, negative and positive aspects affect the way in which they respond to employees' emotional and behavioural concerns (see Zivnuska et al., 2004; Mathur, Nathani, & Dubey, 2013). Therefore, managers' emphasis on the perception aspect may alter their beliefs and attitudes towards human resources, thereby obtaining the maximum contribution from individuals to their organisation. In contrast, employees' reactions to such perceptions will be gradual and accumulative. The process begins with their unconscious behaviour, but will evolve into real behaviours that can be seen in the workplace. This has been explained through the role of organisational cynicism in relation to the connection between perceived organisational politics and organisational silence. Thus, managers need to acknowledge that their employees' perceptions of the organisation's political environment can determine their behaviours, which in turn can impact on the organisation as a whole. Moreover, this effect can have greater repercussions than that of the actual organisational environment itself.

The results illustrate that the mean of the employees' perceived organisational politics was higher than the rest of the variables, which focusses attention on the reasons for this case. Therefore, it is necessary for top management to make decisions that balance between cost and benefits of engaging in behaviours that may be perceived as political (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009)

Interestingly, however, despite the existence of a positive relationship between perceived organisational politics and organisation silence (e.g., Yilmaz, 2014; Liang & Wang, 2016), this study highlights the importance of the mediating role of organisation cynicism. However, the indirect effect of organisation cynicism – ‘attitude’ – holds more clarity in explaining that the sequential correlation are larger among the three variables (cognition, attitude and behaviour), which is in line with previous studies such as Chang, Rosen, and Levy (2009), Yu and Ye (2015) and Tabatabaei and Bigdelli (2015). Moreover, looking at the organisational politics, it appears to have an undesirable and negative effect on the attitudes and behaviours of employees. This result is consistent with the results of many studies (e.g., Mathur, Nathani, & Dubey, 2013; Aro-gundade, Arogundade, & Gbabijo, 2016; Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016). This indicates that perceived politics in organisations will potentially lead to attitudes and behaviours that are not wanted within organisations. Furthermore, it can be argued that perceived organisational politics results in employees moving towards self-interest and promoting their indifference to the interests of the organisation and others (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Malik, Danish, & Ghafoor, 2009). This has all been interpreted by the current study, in the presence of a positive effect of perceived organisational politics on organisational silence, which is something that is harmful to the organisation’s interests owing to the blocking of ideas, opinions and information relating to work.

Managerial implications

This study generates a number of practical implications for managers. First, while managers are processing problems, differences and conflicts among employees, they must take into consideration the level of political behaviour in the processing procedure, since this level will lead to one of the parties’ (sometimes all parties) behaviour being exaggerated. Consequently, this makes individuals think that everything is against them and pushes them to pursue avenues that serve their self-interest regardless of the interests of others, including the organisation. Second, despite the importance of understanding political behaviour, the understanding of how managers perceive their employees’ behaviour is essential, as well as endeavouring to use emotional and social intelligence in interpreting these perceptions. This will allow managers to influence the employees in a number of different ways (e.g., give their support), which is extremely important and offers positive organisational results in terms of changing employees’ views regarding the situation at hand.

The third implication is that dealing with problems linked with organisational politics is not limited to managers at the middle levels, or at the bottom; there is, in fact, an important and significant role for the top management of the hospital or the ministry (see Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009). Their role is to reduce the incidence of political behaviours or reducing factors that contribute to such issues. This can be achieved through: (1) transparency in all actions and organisational activities to root out any apprehension relating to political practices; (2) following-up of serious complaints and grievances submitted by employees, and with precision; (3) clarity, accuracy and generality of instructions issued by top management in order to prevent practice managers or supervisors from using organisational politics in the application of instructions and (4) conducting awareness and guidelines programmes to clarify risks connected with organisational politics that will benefit everyone.

Finally, there is a need to establish open channels of communication between managers or supervisors and employees (see Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003), whether this communication takes place periodically or as needed, since these channels will achieve several benefits for the organisation. Furthermore, their absence would be detrimental. This communication has the potential to eliminate the culture of organisational silence that is disastrous because of the negative attitudes of the employees towards the organisation (see Nafei, 2016). Moreover, these channels have been shown to change many of the negative beliefs and feelings towards the

organisation or its agents (managers or supervisors) (see Mathur, Nathani, & Dubey, 2013). This contributes to changing everyone's motivation in this regard and making individuals more aware of what is happening around them.

Limitations and future research directions

All hypotheses are accepted in this study, particularly as the model clearly demonstrates the role of organisational cynicism as a mediator variable and perceived support as a moderator variable. However, there are still limitations that could be addressed in future research. This study and the model have been applied only in three big hospitals in the health sector in a developing country, namely Iraq. However, using different data in different sectors and in other contexts will help to generalise stronger results. Furthermore, as mentioned, the current study underlines the moderating effect of perceived support on the relationship between organisational silence and perceived organisational politics. Given these results, future research should assess the moderating role of other variables such as organisational trust and perceived organisational justice. This may explain, in greater detail, how it impacts on the occurrence of the phenomenon of organisational silence. In addition, conducting longitudinal studies with further empirical material should support the results obtained in the study. Furthermore, as the variables in this study are complex, the future research might benefit from a qualitative approach to provide richer insights into the antecedents and outcomes associated with the organisational dimensions.

Conclusion

Social exchange theory has been used to make conceptual understanding of the research issues and hence to develop the five hypotheses (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 1986; Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010). The findings reveal that employees' perceptions (negative or positive) of various organisational policies and practices are highly influential to their behaviours in organisations, including the use of organisational silence. This subsequently influences the overall organisational environment, which, in turn, defines employees' attitudes towards their employing organisation. Finally, in spite of the limitations highlighted in the previous section, this study provides academics and managers with an important understanding and interpretation of how employees' perceptions of the negative and positive aspects inside an organisation affects their beliefs, emotions and behaviours. This is obvious from the results obtained through testing the reaction of employees with regard to perceived support and perceived organisational politics. Their roles in mediating and moderating the outcomes for the organisation lead to a number of implications for top management in these organisations to help offset the negative impact of organisation silence.

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