

TESTING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF GROUP STRESS AND GROUP CONFLICT IN GROUP POLITICS AND GROUP PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCES FROM PUBLIC SECTOR

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Abstract *The prevalence of groups and teams at the workplace makes it imperative to understand their effects on group members and their performance. In fact, the growing use of work groups has impelled scholars & management theorists to analyse the various factors that determine or hinder group performance and effectiveness. This paper focuses on the mediation effects of group conflict and group stress on group politics and group performance relationship. The study is confined to the groups working in head offices of J&K public corporations of Jammu city. Census method is followed in contacting 1189 employees (group members) working in the head offices of all the eighteen J&K public corporations, out of which 888 employees responded effectively. Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure is applied to check mediating role of group conflict and group stress in group politics- group performance relationship. Results revealed that group stress fully mediates the group politics – group performance relationship whereas group conflict partially mediates this relationship. The study suggests that the managers of public sector corporations must take necessary steps to reduce favouritism in their respective corporations by applying pay and promotion policies ethically, rewarding the hardworking people, equal interaction with all the members, giving chance to every employee to complete the assigned task, educating the staff regarding various policies and creating an environment of trust. Moreover, public sector employees must be encouraged to make use of RTI so that they could keep a check on their corporation's activities and ensure transparency in the system. This study is restricted to the public sector groups only and future studies could be conducted on the professional groups and private sector groups.*

Keywords: *Group Politics, Group Stress, Group Conflict, Group Performance, Public Sector*

INTRODUCTION

Today's organisations rely on groups and teams to perform complex tasks that are demanding and require a coordinated effort. Some of the merits that groups offer include the capacity to pool resources, exchange information, coordinate actions, and shared decision making.

However, group members do not always operate as a team, and real-world examples proved that lack of teamwork or failure to function collectively as a team has even led to disastrous consequences (Driskell et al., 2010). Unfair treatment, group conflict, group stress and group political behaviour are found to be one of the major determinants in reducing performance at individual level as well as at group level (Cropanzano & Wright, 2011). The purpose of this paper is to examine the mediating role of group stress

and group conflict in group politics and group performance relationship. Group performance can be defined as the extent to which a group meets or exceeds its standards, group output and satisfaction of group members. Goodman, Ravlin and Schmine (1987) suggested that group performance is multidimensional and should be operationalised relative to the activities of the group. Bandura (1986) suggested that self-appraisals are valid predictors of performance as individuals are often the best judges of their own performance and by getting involved in a job or venture; they may become more motivated to improve their performance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conflict refers to a situation when two or more individuals or groups believe that they have needs that cannot be

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mutually satisfied or that cannot be reconciled or integrated. Relationship conflict, process conflict and inter-role conflict negatively affect team performance in terms of wastage of scarce resources, lower job satisfaction, job involvement, tension, propensity to leave the job etc. (Greer et al., 2011; Henry, 2009). Interpersonal conflicts that are related to personality issues are damaging group efforts while task-based conflicts are proving helpful in increasing organisational innovativeness and improving the quality of decisions in the organisation (Henry, 2009; Amason & Schweiger, 1997). For resolving such conflicts, organisations should follow-up group interactions and activities so as to ensure a degree of functionality compatible to conflicts (Ikeda et al., 2005). Politics is ‘an individual or group behaviour that is informal, typically divisive and above all, in the technical sense, illegitimate - sanctioned neither by formal authority, accepted ideology, nor certified expertise’ (Mintzberg, 1984). Low trust climate, lack of justice and job ambiguity are the antecedents of organisational politics which negatively affect organisational performance and involves self-serving & unsanctioned behaviour which may be divisive, illegitimate, dysfunctional and can produce conflict (Wen, Shin-Chin & Shih, 2009). Political behaviour is high in organisations where rules and policies for guidance are not clearly defined by authorities (Drory & Romm, 1990; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997) and employees gradually develop their own rules and policies for self interest and for attaining a better position in organisations. Perceptions of organisational politics differ substantially across sectors and prove higher in the public than in the private sector (Vigoda-Gadot & Kapun, 2005). Organisation politics is negatively related to job involvement and job satisfaction but has positive relation with turnover intentions (Sowmya & Panchanatham, 2009). In regards to the experience of role stressors among employees, literature revealed that some public sector employees faced difficulty in completing their assigned jobs properly due to task overload (Sharpley, Reynolds, Acosta & Dua, 1996). Winefield (2000) concluded that increased stress levels were associated with increased workload and reduced rewards while Sharpley et al. (1996) reported that lack of regular feedback about how well academics were doing was the highest source of stress. Higher ambiguity may also arise due to lack of clarity regarding how to juggle different academic activities of teaching, research and professional services that are necessary for the successful accomplishment of academic role (Gillespie et al., 2001). To overcome such problems in the organisations, Priesemuth, Arnaud and Schminke (2013) stressed the importance of fairness in organisation culture which exerted a significant effect on reducing political behaviour in work groups. Further, to enhance organisational performance, team coordination, training, flexible work design, and 360-degree performance feedback (Atwater, Brett & Charles, 2007) are also suggested in the group literature. Regular, formal, direct, verbal and

written feedback from a supervisor and informal feedback throughout the year may reduce role ambiguity, which in turn reduces stress. On the basis of aforesaid literature, a proposed theoretical model is given in Figure 1.

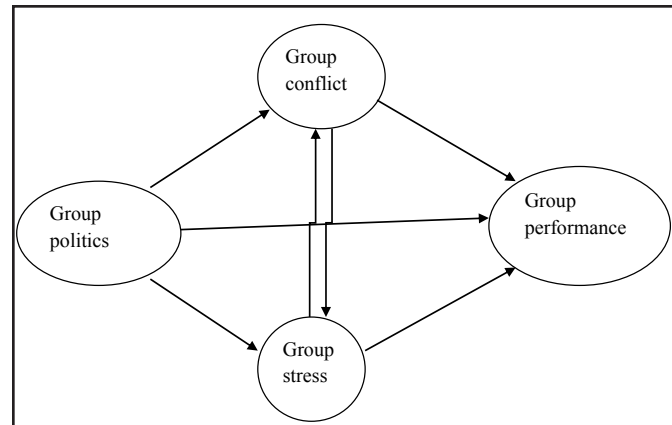


Fig. 1: Mediating Role of Group Stress and Group Conflict in Group Politics and Group Stress Relationship

In accordance with the above theoretical frame work, the following hypotheses are framed:

- H1: Group conflict mediates group politics – group performance relationship.
 H2: Group stress mediates group politics – group performance relationship.
 H3: Group stress significantly affects group conflict.
 H4: Group conflict significantly affects group stress.

METHODOLOGY

Method for this study including measures, data collection and analytical strategy is described below:

Measures

The dimensions of group conflict & group stress are assessed by using an adapted version of scales developed by De Dreu & Van Vianen (2001), Friedman et al. (2000), Hon & Chan (2013); Greer et al. (2011) and Delmonte, A.J. (2004). Group politics and group performance are measured by using scales developed by Haq Inam (2011); Sowmya & Panchnatham (2009); Dereck C. Man & Simon (2003); Roe et al (1995); Heilman, Block & Lucas (1992). All statements measuring group conflict, group stress, group politics and group performance were anchored on 5 point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

DATA COLLECTION

The study is confined to the groups working in head offices of J&K public corporations of Jammu city. Census method

is followed in contacting 1189 employees (group members) working in the head offices of all the eighteen J&K public corporations, out of which 888 employees responded effectively (Table 1). The organisational units/ section/ department are treated as groups in this study and the number of groups came to be 114. The groups were selected on the basis of the number of employees working interdependently. The groups fulfilled two criteria, they had a minimum of three members each and they work interdependently (Langfred, 2005). The groups included management groups, supervision groups, supporting groups, mechanical section groups, legal section groups, finance section groups etc.

Group-level phenomena can be measured in a variety of ways but in the organisational sciences, the most common approach is to collect individual survey responses and aggregate those to the group level (Klein et al., 2001). In this study, the group scores are obtained by aggregating the individual scores on each item within the groups.

Analytical Strategy

Prior to using the group averages, however, the validity of aggregating individual scores should be investigated by the

reliabilities of responses among employees in the same group (Hofmann & Stetzer, 1998; Patterson et al., 1996). James (1982) viewed intra class correlations (ICCs) as representative of the reliability between raters and recommended it as a criterion for aggregating individual responses. Inter-rater reliability, referred to as ICC (1), compares between-group to within-group variances using the individual ratings of each respondent. The reliability of means, referred to as ICC (2), assesses the relative status of between-group and within-group variances using the average ratings of respondents within each group (Schneider et al., 1998). James (1982) reported ICC (1) value of approximately 0.12 in his review of the literature and Schneider et al. (1998) recommended an ICC (2) cut-off of 0.60. After obtaining ICC (1) and ICC (2) for various constructs, rwg (j) statistics are computed which assesses the consistency of responses within groups, and higher consistency (i.e., $\geq .70$) suggests that responses represent the properties of the group or organisational unit and justify the aggregation within that group (Klein et al., 2000). The mean rwg (j) values, ICC (1) and ICC (2) values for various constructs of the study are either close to or above the conventionally acceptable values of 0.70, 0.12 and 0.60 respectively (James et al., 1984; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). On the basis of these results, it is concluded that the aggregation of various constructs are justified and they can be used as group level variables (Table 2).

Table 1: List of Sample Corporations, Respondents and Groups

S.no.	List of J&K Public Corporations	No. of employees	Effective response	No. of groups
1.	J&K Power Development Corporation	127	95	8
2.	J&K State AGRO Industries Development Corporation Limited	51	49	4
3.	J&K State Industrial Development Corporation	40	35	5
4.	J&K Minerals Limited	52	46	4
5.	J&K State Handicraft (S&E) Corporation	10	6	2
6.	J&K State Handloom Corporation Limited	34	23	3
7.	J&K Small Industries Corporation	35	31	4
8.	J&K Women Development Corporation	20	16	5
9.	J&K Project Construction Corporation	178	165	15
10.	J&K State Financial Corporation	187	101	8
11.	J&K State Road Transport Corporation	60	52	5
12.	J&K Cements Limited	41	36	5
13.	J&K SC, ST & OBC Development Corporation	53	25	7
14.	J&K State Forest Corporation	114	97	13
15.	J&K Horticulture Produce Marketing And Processing Corporation Limited	24	20	5
16.	J&K Industries Limited	24	18	4
17.	J&K State Cable Car Corporation	12	10	2
18.	J&K Tourism Development Corporation	127	50	15
	Total	1189	875	114

Table 2: Inter-Rater Reliability and Inter-Rater Agreement within Group

Construct/ Dimension	ICC (1) (Criteria ≥ 0.12)	ICC (2) (Criteria ≥ 0.60)	rwg (j) (Criteria ≥ 0.70)
Group conflict	.27	.65	.94
Group stress	.31	.52	.85
Group politics	.18	.60	.93
Group performance	.57	.82	.85

DATA ANALYSIS

The data have been analysed with the help of two softwares (SPSS and AMOS). Before data analysis, it was duly purified with the help of exploratory factor analysis and validated through Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The detailed result of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis is as under:

Data Purification through Exploratory Factor Analysis

After editing and coding, descriptive statistics is run to check the normality of the data. After deletion of thirteen outliers, the effective sample is arrived at 875 respondents. Further, the multivariate data reduction technique of factor analysis is carried with Principal Component Analysis method along with orthogonal rotation procedure for summarising the original information with minimum factors and optimal coverage. The statements with factor loading less than 0.5 and eigenvalue less than 1.0 are ignored for the subsequent analysis (Hair et al., 2009). The data reduction is performed in three steps. First of all, in the anti-image correlation the items with value less than 0.5 on the diagonal axis are deleted. In the second step, the extracted communalities are checked (amount of variance in each variable) and items with values less than 0.5 are ignored for the further analysis. In the third step, in rotated component matrices statements with multiple loadings and values less than 0.5 are deleted. Further, value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) above 0.70 and significant Bartlett’s test of Sphericity (BTS) is considered as an indicator of appropriateness of using exploratory factor analysis (Malhotra, 2007). Beside these, variance explained (VE) above 50% is also taken into consideration. The results of the EFA are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Results from Scale Purification of Constructs using Rotated Component Method

Factor - Wise Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Factor Loading	Variance Explained	Alpha (α)	Communality Value
GROUP CONFLICT						
F1: Group Harmony				28.415	.994	
1. Employees from different departments feel that goals of their respective departments are in harmony with each other	4.231	.621	.994			.994
2. Most departments in this organisation get along with each other	4.229	.615	.994			.994
F2: Group Interaction				27.830	.971	
1. Managers discourage discussion of work-related matters	2.160	.659	.984			.971
2. People in one department generally like interacting with those from other departments	4.141	.661	.982			.971
F3: Unclear Rules and Regulations				27.670	.710	
1. There is a lack of unity among employees	2.176	.651	.848			.721
2. The department lacks rules & regulations	2.202	.666	.814			.766
3. Conflict is very common in this corporation	2.339	.924	.744			.557
GROUP POLITICS						
F1: Favouritism				43.412	.788	
1. Pay & promotion policies are applied politically only	3.382	1.253	.868			.856

2. Agreeing with powerful people is the best alternative in this corporation	3.591	1.117	.853			.850
3. Promotions in this corporation generally go to yes-man/ yes-women	3.489	1.159	.849			.738
4. Favoritism rather than merit determines future advancement in the organisation	3.480	1.297	.788			.732
5. Managers in this corporation often hire the only people who can help them in future	3.320	1.116	.750			.679
F2: Self Centered Approach				26.904	.795	
1. Rewards come only to those who work hard in this organisation	2.130	.649	.968			.939
2. People in this corporation attempt to build themselves up by tearing down others	2.133	.648	.967			.938
3. Co-workers offer some assistance only when they expect something out of it	2.466	1.071	.693			.529
4. Your co-workers help themselves and not others	3.355	1.163	.685			.519
GROUP STRESS						
F1: Strained Relationships				25.446	.845	
4.1 3. 1. Employees are not given opportunities to talk about 4.2 issues causing stress	3.835	.729	.848			.737
4.3 2. Strained relationships at work cause stress	4.002	.716	.815			.743
4.4.3. Lack of participation in decision – making creates 4.5 stress among employees	4.014	.634	.747			.811
F2: Lack of Participation				22.848	.988	
1. Lack of participation in decision – making creates stress among employees	3.753	.851	.989			.985
2. Management is not open or receptive to new ideas from employees	3.754	.854	.982			.982
F2: Lack of Participation				22.567	.705	
1. Insufficient prospects for promotion & career growth cause stress	4.184	.391	.780			.794
2. Financial constraints at the job cause stress	4.253	.508	.667			.550
GROUP PERFORMANCE				39.702	.705	
F1: Task completion						
1. Group members work together to complete group assignments	4.064	.607	.868			.721
2. Our group members complete designated tasks in a timely manner	4.024	.540	.814			.696
3. Our group deserves a positive evaluation	4.361	.578	.744			.578
F2: Work Efficiency				23.089	.682	
1. Our group produces high quality work	3.829	.772	.797			.785
2. Our group completes the work effectively	4.203	.716	.776			.743

Scale Validation - Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) enables us to test how well the measured variables represent the latent constructs. In other words, CFA is a tool that enables us to either confirm or reject our preconceived theory. CFA cannot be conducted without a measurement theory. It is a way of testing how well measured variables represent a latent construct (Hair et al., 2009). Fitness of the model has been assessed with various global fit indices like goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), normed fit index (NFI), Tucker- Lewis Index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), Root mean squared error (RMR) and Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). For the model to be fit, at least one absolute criterion and one incremental fit criterion should be above 0.90 (Hair et al. 2006).

To assess the dimensionality of the various group constructs, second order CFA based on the indicators and resulting factors was performed. The models came out to be a good fit model as depicted by the good values of fit indices (Table 4) with GFI, AGFI, CFI, TLI and NFI values above .90, χ^2/df values below 5, RMR and RMSEA values less than .08. The model is also valid and reliable as depicted by AVE and high CR values (Table 5).

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity shows that a test of a concept is not highly correlated with other tests designed to measure theoretically different concepts. It has been proved by comparing the variance extracted with squared correlations among four constructs. The variance extracted for the constructs is found to be higher than their squared correlation values thereby proving discriminant validity of the constructs.

Table 4: Fit Indices of Measurement Models

Dimension/ Construct	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMR
Group conflict	3.010	0.984	0.972	0.978	0.968	0.954	0.084	0.080
Group politics	2.158	0.891	0.839	0.844	0.746	0.801	0.081	0.069
Group stress	2.780	0.894	0.881	0.901	0.855	0.888	0.079	0.021
Group performance	3.398	0.949	0.908	0.950	0.909	0.929	0.072	0.077

Table 5: Reliability and Validity of Scale

Dimension/Construct	AVE	CR
Group conflict	0.755	0.853
Group politics	0.732	0.789
Group stress	0.803	0.853
Group performance	0.629	0.966

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Public Corporations

Most of the corporations in J&K in general have been established under Companies Act, 1956 as private limited companies fully owned by the Government. The present study deals with head offices of eighteen J&K public Corporations functioning in Jammu city.

Hypotheses Testing

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a tool for analysing multivariate data that has been long known in marketing to be especially appropriate for theory testing (Bagozzi, 1980). SEM is superior to ordinary regression models as it

incorporates multiple independent and dependent variables as well as hypothetical latent constructs. It also provides a way to test the specified set of relationships among observed and latent variables as whole (MacCallum and Austin, 2000).

Mediating Role of Group Conflict in Group Politics-Group Performance Relationship

In order to test the mediating effect, all the conditions described by Baron & Kenny (1986) are satisfied. These conditions are (a) the relationship between independent variable and dependent variable should be significant, (b) the relationship between independent variable and the third variable i.e. the mediator should be significant, (c) the relationship between mediator or third variable and outcome should be significant and (d) when the mediator

is entered into the equation, the relationship between independent variable and dependent variable should become insignificant. Application of the Baron and Kenny’s (1986) procedure revealed partial mediation effect of group conflict (Fig. 2 & Table 6). This is because when mediator is entered between group politics and group performance, the direct relationship gets reduced but is still significant (SRW=0.55, $p < .05$). Thus, the hypothesis H1 is partially accepted.

Table 6: Mediating Effects of Group Conflict in GPO-GPF Relationship

Step	Relationship	Sig. level
1	GPO → GC	0.61 ($p < 0.01$)
2	GC → GPF	-0.50 ($p < 0.01$)
3	GPO → GPF	-0.64 ($p < 0.01$)
4	GPO → GC → GPF	-0.55 ($p < 0.01$)

Key: GC (Group conflict), GH (Group harmony), GI (Group interaction) and URR (Unclear rules & regulations), GPO (Group politics), FAV (Favouritism), SCA (Self centred approach), GPR (Group performance), TC (Task completion), WE (Work efficiency) are the observed variables, OP2-OP9, S1-S8, OC2-OC13, GP2-GP8 are the indicators and e1-e39 are the error terms.

Results of Baron & Kenny’s (1986) procedure supports full mediation, in step 4, when mediator (group stress) is entered between group politics and group performance, the direct relationship between the two became insignificant which reveals that group stress creates group politics, which in turn deteriorates the performance of the groups (Fig. 3 & Table 6). Thus, the hypothesis H2 stands accepted.

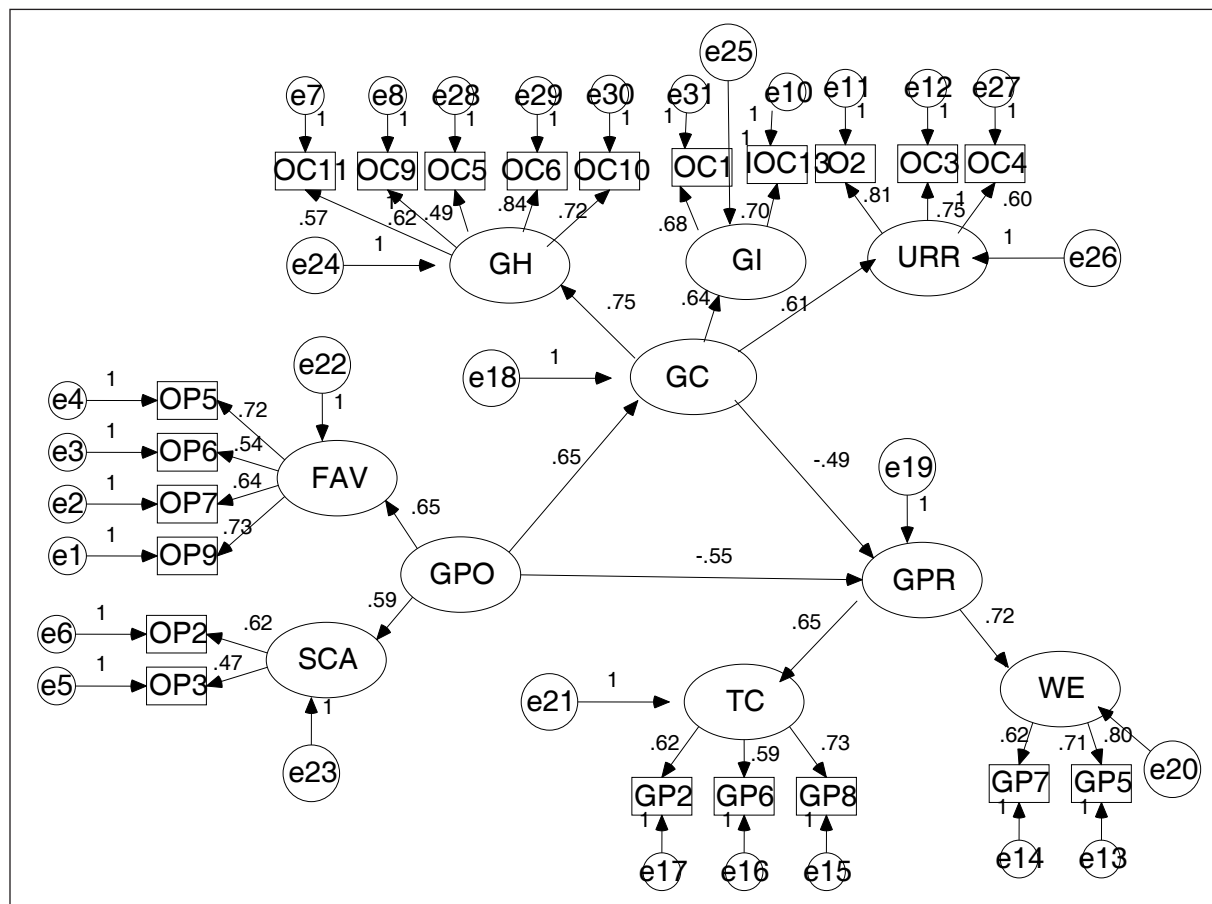


Fig. 2: Mediating Effects of Group Conflict in GPO-GPF Relationship

Key: GC (Group conflict), GH (Group harmony), GI (Group interaction) and URR (Unclear rules & regulations), GPO (Group politics), FAV (Favouritism), SCA (Self centred approach), GPR (Group performance), TC (Task completion), WE (Work efficiency) are the observed variables, OP2-OP9, S1-S8, OC2-OC13, GP2-GP8 are the indicators and e1-e39 are the error terms.

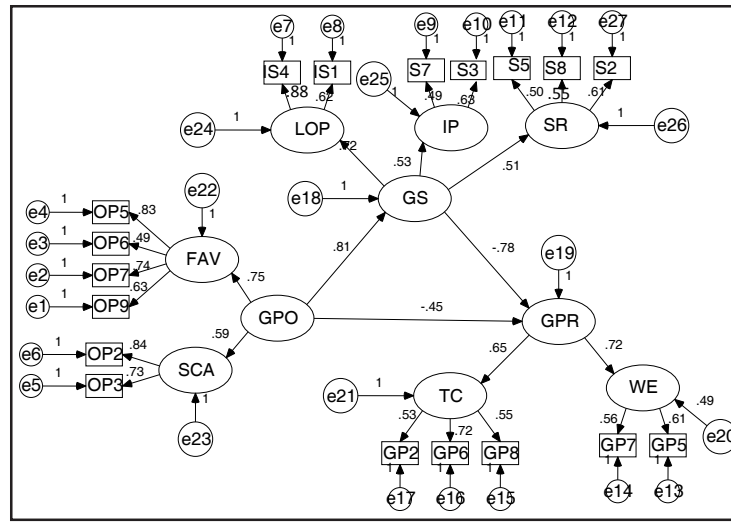


Fig. 3: Mediating Role of Group Stress in Group Politics-Group Performance Relationship

Key: GPO (Group politics), FAV (Favouritism), SCA (Self centred approach), GPR (Group performance), TC (Task completion), WE (Work efficiency), GS (Group stress), LOP (Lack of participation), IP (Insufficient prospects), SR (Strained relationships) are the observed variables, OP2-OP9, S1-S8, GP2-GP8 are the indicators and e1-e39 are the error terms.

Table 6: Mediating Effects of Group Stress in GPO-GPF Relationship

Step	Relationship	Sig. level
1	GPO → GS	0.69 (p<0.01)
2	GS → GPF	-0.73 (p<0.01)
3	GPO → GPF	-0.64 (p<0.01)
4	GPO → GS → GPF	-0.45 (p>0.05)

Group Stress and Group Conflict

It becomes evident from SEM results that group stress positively affects group conflict and group conflict in turn significantly affects group stress (Fig.4). Thus, hypotheses H3 and H4 are accepted.

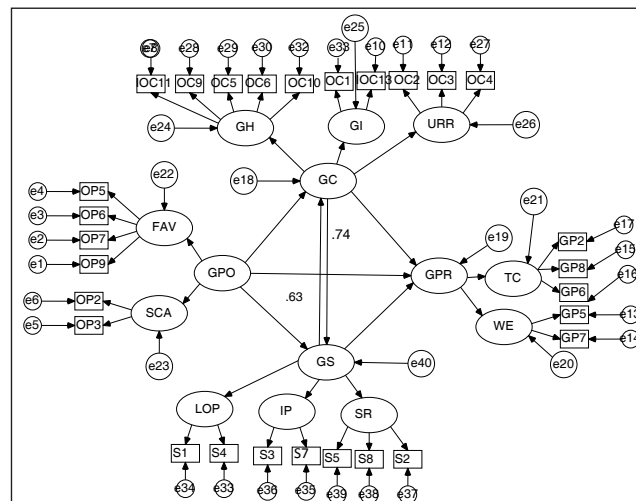


Fig. 4: Relationship between Group Conflict and Group Stress

Key: GC (Group conflict), GH (Group harmony), GI (Group interaction) and URR (Unclear rules & regulations), GPO (Group politics), FAV (Favouritism), SCA (Self centred approach), GP (Group performance), TC (Task completion), WE (Work efficiency), GS (Group stress), LOP (Lack of participation), IP (Insufficient prospects), SR (Strained relationships) are the observed variables, OP2-OP9, S1-S8, OC2-OC13, GP2-GP8 are the indicators and e1-e39 are the error terms.

CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Research on the topic has led to the understanding that conflict and stress negatively affect the performance of employees. In this study exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis have been used to empirically verify and revalidate underlying dimensions of role stressors and organisational conflict scale. The findings suggest that role conflict creates stress among employees, which is supported by Jawahar et al. (2007), Hobfoll, (1989, 2002) etc. The findings further revealed that when an individual experiences role ambiguity, his or her ability to visualize job performance is affected which is in line with earlier research (Li & Bagger, 2008). Results also support the previous research on conflict-stress relationship that shows when employees face conflicts between the two lines of authority that make up the organizational structure of the corporations, they experience stress (Corwin, R. 1961. & Georgopolous, B., and F. Mann. 1962).

This paper is an insightful addition to the current literature regarding work-related stress and politics in the Indian context in general and public sector in particular. This research provides not only information about mediating effects of work-related stress and conflict in public sector groups, but also sheds light on how stress along with conflict and politics can be prevented at the work place. The managers of public sector corporations must take necessary steps to reduce favouritism in their respective corporations by applying pay and promotion policies ethically, rewarding the hardworking people, equal interaction with all the members, giving chance to every employee to complete the assigned task, educating the staff regarding various policies and creating an environment of trust. Moreover, public sector employees must be encouraged to make use of RTI so that they could keep a check on their corporation's activities and ensure transparency in the system. Employees also need trust, respect, supportive and cooperative environment from their work groups and respective corporations. So, corporations should focus on boosting and developing supervisory support strategies for improving employees' perceptions of fairness. By promoting open discussions and interactions, managers could minimise misunderstandings and provide clear expectations about performance goals to the employees and groups. Further, managers must spend time with the various groups, providing information about the skills needed in the groups and helping the groups when they confront difficulties and need manager's help. Proper grievance handling machinery can also be used to sort out the hurdles and problems faced by employees so that they could optimally utilise their time and energy for official work. Collateral programmes like stress management programmes, health promotion programmes, employee

fitness programmes and other kinds of programmes must be introduced in the corporation as these fringe benefits relieve employees from stress.

Future research based on the results of this study may proceed towards the methodological and contextual directions. Since stress has been associated with a wide variety of work and non-work conditions, these findings suggested the need for future research to identify additional variables that involve public sector employees, private sector employees and other occupations. It would be invaluable to determine if the nature of role stressors is similar or different when the wider array of setting are considered. In future research, a comparison between managerial and non-managerial staff in terms of perceptions of stress, conflict and politics could be taken. This study is based on group level of analysis and future researchers can also consider individual level of analysis in their studies that could be of interest to academics and administration.

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