

# Journal of Development Policy, Research, & Practice

ISSN (P): [2522-3410](#)

ISSN (E): [2663-3698](#)



Volume 7, 2023

## Article History

### Submitted:

May 05, 2023

### Last Revised:

July 17, 2023

### Accepted:

Dec 19, 2023

### Funding

No

### Copyright

The Authors

## Impact of Organisational Politics Perceptions on Doctoral Students' Engagement and Performance: Exploring the Mediating Role of Supervisor Support

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### Article Link:

<https://journals.sdpi.org/index.php/JoDPRP/article/view/65/version/65>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59926/jodprp.vol07/05>

### Citation:

Rubaca, U. and Munir, M. M. 2023, 'Impact of Organisational Politics Perceptions on Doctoral Students' Engagement and Performance: Exploring the Mediating Role of Supervisor Support?'. *Journal of Development Policy, Research & Practice*, vol. 7, pp. 92-121.

**Conflict of Interest:** Authors declared no Conflict of Interest

**Acknowledgment:** No administrative and technical support was taken for this research

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## **Impact of Organisational Politics Perceptions on Doctoral Students' Engagement and Performance: Exploring the Mediating Role of Supervisor Support**

*Ume Rubaca and Malik Mamoon Munir\**

### **ABSTRACT**

*The study investigates the possible linkage of organisational politics with the academic performance of doctoral students, mediated by work engagement and moderated by perceived supervisor support, based on the 'Broaden-and-Build Theory'. The authors collected multisource data through structured questionnaires from 432 doctoral students and their supervisors, which was analysed using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique in SmartPLS 4. Analysis showed that organisational politics negatively impacts academic performance with the partial mediation of work engagement. However, perceived supervisor support buffered this association, thus, reducing the indirect effects on academic performance. The findings are useful for the management of Higher Education Institutes/Universities (HEIs) into how and why the perception of organisational politics could lead to poor academic performance of students enrolled in doctoral studies. The findings also direct university management to take necessary measures by which students' academic performance could be enhanced through their work engagement and perceived supervisor support.*

**Keywords:** Organisational Politics, Work Engagement, Academic Performance, Perceived Supervisor Support, Doctoral Students.

**JEL Classification Codes:** I21

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### ***Background***

Environment and human interactions are the main actors of the knowledge-creation process in a higher education organisational setting where employees perform their duties (Suorsa and Huotari, 2016). This also highlights the importance of academic behaviour and achievements of a university in terms of its students, specifically those pursuing higher education. Research indicates many factors, such as emotional stability, personality traits, academic behaviour, and academic performance, which help students achieve their educational targets, thus, becoming valuable members of society (Naseer *et al.*, 2022). However, collaborating with industry practitioners requires problem-solving, conflict management, and long-term relationships, which can lead to high accomplishments in life (Qualter *et al.*, 2012). It also means that the university student's academic performance is the key to successfully collaborating with industry practitioners for valuable developments. At the same time, academic performance indicates the student's career choice and job performance, enabling recruiters to select the right person for a job (Chia, 2005). Considering the excessive costs attached to doctoral education, past studies demonstrate a long list of factors that affect the successful completion of the doctoral degree programme ranging from individual demographics to institutional and department factors (Valero, 2001). Though, individual characteristics such as financial background and academic excellence, and institutional factors such as university ranking defines the choice of admission, it is the department which plays a key role in implementing research practices and policies, thus, influencing doctoral students' academic performance.

### ***Problem Statement***

Regrettably, in recent years, there has been a concerning trend in universities prioritising teaching over research in science and humanities, relegating these crucial areas to a secondary status. Moreover, Pakistan's education system and teaching methods in particular focus on memorisation (rote learning) rather than conceptual learning (Varghese, 2008). Doctoral students in higher education degree programmes continue to be a marginalised group. This marginalisation stems from several unaddressed issues: a deficiency in industrial knowledge, limited employment opportunities, uneven distribution of resources, and a mismatch between their acquired knowledge and the specific needs of the local industry (Kreimer and Meyer 2008). These problems persist without empirical evidence to guide effective solutions. Abundant research, including Malkawi *et al.* (2008) emphasises the role of industry-university collaboration in fostering sustainable economic growth. Such collaboration shapes market dynamics and creates suitable job opportunities, which are particularly beneficial for doctoral students.

Although relevant literature often focuses on various external factors, it frequently overlooks the influence of organisational and departmental internal factors in addressing these issues. The practices of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and their departments are crucial in shaping doctoral students' academic performance. As Ribeiro (2008) notes, this environment is instrumental in enabling these students to address industrial challenges effectively through high-quality research.

Previous studies, including those by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), have consistently identified work engagement as a key factor influencing performance. This concept relates specifically to an individual's relationship with their work, where a higher level of engagement is predictive of enhanced future performance. Conversely, low engagement is often linked to poor performance, making it a focal point for academic research aimed at uncovering its underlying causes. Leiter and Bakker (2010) note that an individual's positive association with work - characterised by enjoyment, fulfilment, interest, and satisfaction - plays a crucial role in preventing burnout and exhaustion, leading to beneficial outcomes like increased innovation and creativity. Bakker and Albrecht (2018) further expand on this by highlighting that engagement levels vary based on individual traits, contextual factors, and task-related differences, underscoring the complexity of this relationship.

Personal work engagement is 'a process by which people regulate their performance at work by regulating their energy through the investment of resources' (Kahn, 1990). However, the most used construct of work engagement is multidimensional, with three positive dimensions related to the mental state: vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Engaged individuals are enthusiastic as they bring about positive returns for the organisation rather than disengaged ones due to their performance (Stefano and Gaudiino 2019). Several studies have uncovered the determining role of the perception of organisational politics on work engagement (Chinelato *et al.*, 2020; Karatepe, 2013). Agarwal (2016) points out a key limitation in existing research on organisational politics and its outcomes: the gap between perceived and actual politics.

In developing countries, HEIs face intense competition from local and international competitors which intensifies group formation at the employee level for mutual group benefits using fair and unfair means. The prevalence of such actions in an organisational setting is attributed to politics (Asrar-ul-Haq *et al.*, 2019). Organisational politics has become a reality, and its root cause is scarcity of resources which makes employees engage in activities through which they can use organisational resources for personal advantage. In this way, organisational politics can provide personal gains, job accomplishment, recognition, and career growth with adversarial effects due to intense competition and resource misuse (Varela-Neira *et al.*, 2018). According to Ferris *et al.* (1989), organisational politics have direct impacts on performance due to stress leading to

strain and, in this way, affect behaviour. This study aims to address a gap in the current understanding by exploring ways in which organisational politics might influence the academic performance of doctoral students, and the reasons behind this relationship.

Supervisors play a significant role in subordinates' performance (Shanock and Eisenberger 2006). Most organisational research on Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS) outcomes is restricted to employee turnover (DeConinck and Johnson 2009; Maetrz *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, a few studies have explored its role in employee performance (Gagnon and Michael 2004; Tarcan *et al.*, 2021). However, how PSS impacts doctoral students' academic performance, specifically through their work engagement remains an under-researched area (Khuram *et al.*, 2021).

### ***Study Objective and Significance***

The study aims to bridge a gap in existing literature by linking organisational politics with the academic performance of doctoral students, focusing on the mediating impact of work engagement and the buffering effect of PSS. Utilising the 'Broaden-and-Build Theory', it seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms at play. The findings of the study are expected to guide universities in enhancing the quality of their research. By improving the academic performance of doctoral graduates, who play a crucial role in solving industrial challenges, universities can indirectly achieve higher ranking.

Theoretically, the study elucidates the underlying mechanism by which the perception of organisational politics influences the work engagement and academic performance of doctoral students. It identifies supervisor support as a moderating factor, thereby contributing new insights to the existing body of literature in this field. On a practical level, it provides empirical evidence on the adverse effects of perceived organisational politics, corroborating the findings of Ferris *et al.* (1993). It also introduces supervisor support as a potential mitigating solution for such negative impacts, as suggested by Harris and Kacmar (2005). The findings underscore the crucial role supervisors can play in maintaining their supervisees' energy, which might be compromised by workplace stressors. The research indicates that not only supervisees but also their supervisors can fall victim to the consequences of political behaviours, especially when linked to their supervisees' poor work engagement and academic performance. Moreover, the study highlights the significance of supervisor support in accelerating student progress, particularly when both supervisor and student share common research interests, as observed by Seeber and Horta (2021). University management should also seriously consider this matter which might affect the university's reputation and ranking. The study not only considers institutional and departmental factors but also underscores the crucial role of doctoral students' engagement with their research thesis. This aspect is a distinctive contribution to the field, as, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no prior research has established the link between doctoral students' work engagement, their

academic performance, and their perceptions of organisational politics. The study emphasises that work engagement is pivotal for academic success and suggests that the timely completion of a doctoral program hinges on the student's engagement with their thesis, facilitating the achievement of their goals. Furthermore, supervisor support is highlighted as a key factor in reinforcing the link between academic performance and work engagement. While work engagement is acknowledged as vital for performance, extensive research in this area has predominantly focused on employees in organisational settings (Badi *et al.*, 2023), primarily within the framework of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model.

## **2. ORGANISATIONAL POLITICS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

Organisational politics is recognised as a significant issue, often having negative impacts on employee behaviour, as noted by Ferris *et al.* (2002). It is commonly perceived as harmful to both organisations and their employees due to its manipulative and self-serving nature, a viewpoint supported by Ladebo (2006). Furthermore, studies, including that of Judge and Bretz (1994), suggest that employees who perceive high levels of organisational politics are more likely to engage in behaviours aimed at influencing others in order to secure favourable performance evaluations. Similarly, a high perception of organisational politics creates an atmosphere of injustice due to the unequal distribution of rewards due to subjective factors like power and relationships (Chang *et al.*, 2009). Employees involved in organisational politics develop interpersonal relationships with their supervisors due to their authority, for personal gains (Hochwarter *et al.*, 2003).

Academic performance is measured in various ways, reflecting its dynamic nature. For instance, some measure it based on percentage marks or average grades, as highlighted by Alhadabi and Karpinski (2020). Different countries also have distinct evaluation criteria for doctoral students. In China, universities consider a combination of coursework and research to award doctorates, akin to the approach in Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom, where a significant emphasis is placed on research publications as a criterion for evaluating doctoral students, as noted by Jackson (2013).

In Pakistan, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) implements a standardised policy for awarding doctoral degrees. This policy includes specific enrollment criteria and a clear roadmap for doctoral students to follow. The conferral of a PhD degree is contingent upon several requirements: passing the coursework, successfully completing a comprehensive exam within two years of admission, and publishing research from the thesis in a journal recognised by the HEC (HEC, 2021). Such a criterion puts extra pressure on doctoral students and their supervisors to produce quality research published in peer-reviewed journals or make conference presentations (O'Keeffe, 2020). The

criterion not only indicates a doctoral student's journey but also highlights the supervisor's role (Palos *et al.*, 2019). Many researchers have studied several determinants of students' academic performance, such as extra-compulsory learning (Licari and Mattei, 2020), eating disorders (Claydon and Sullig, 2019), sociodemographic, mental health (Alhadabi and Karpinski 2020) and traumatic incidents such as COVID-19 and related experiences (Rubaca *et al.*, 2022).

Similarly, the university's learning environment also affects the students' learning outcomes (Lissio *et al.*, 2002). Organisational politics affect employee outcomes such as intention to leave the organisation and job neglect (Vigoda, 2000). However, its linkage with doctoral students' academic performance remained missing, except for a few studies exploring its positive role in reducing academic corruption (Mahmoudi and Majd, 2021). Considering the detrimental impact of organisational politics on employee outcomes, this study posits that students who perceive such politics experience heightened stress and additional pressure. It was hypothesised that these factors negatively influence their academic performance. Therefore, the study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Perception of organisational politics negatively affects academic performance.*

#### **a. Work Engagement as a Mediator**

Work engagement is 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002, p. 74). Vigour refers to mental resilience and persistence to face tricky situations with high energy levels; dedication is related to inspiration and enthusiasm; absorption indicates immersion into one's work without noticing the time. Work engagement depicts the investment of emotional, physical, or cognitive involvement of employees in their assigned tasks (Kahn, 1990). Work engagement remained the attentional focus of organisational researchers in academia (Lu *et al.*, 2018) and the corporate world (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Its importance for organisational gains is obvious due to its predictive role in organisational citizenship behaviour, organisational commitment, and task performance (Byrne *et al.*, 2016; LePine *et al.*, 2000). Work engagement is a negative determinant of emotional exhaustion (Hakanen *et al.*, 2018). However, research indicates that limited resources bind individuals, due to which overreliance on mental, physical, or emotional resources might result in resource depletion with associated negative outcomes for the individuals and the organisation. Similarly, engaged employees display fulfilling work attitudes that directly affect organisational effectiveness (Saks, 2006), such as reduced absenteeism and intention to quit. Previous studies have focused on the role of work engagement as an antithesis of burnout (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001), which is affected by the environment; therefore, organisations foster a favourable work environment to gain favourable outcomes (Gonsáles-Romá *et al.*, 2006).

A plethora of research has linked work engagement to employee performance, such as in-role performance (Bakker *et al.*, 2014), supervisor-rated task performance (Rich *et al.*, 2010), colleague-rated in-role performance (Bakker *et al.*, 2012) and colleague-rated customer-oriented OCB (Lyu *et al.*, 2016). In short, work engagement is well-studied for work-related outcomes, which highlights its importance for the academic performance of doctoral students. However, some contradictory findings about how work engagement impacts work outcomes are also dependent on organisational politics, which indicates that organisational politics might result in biased ratings of the subordinate's performance by the supervisor (Guo *et al.*, 2019). Organisational politics is a threatening self-sanctioned behaviour to strategically enhance self-interest (Ferris *et al.*, 2002). Several studies have explored its determining role in work engagement (Karatepe, 2013) and uncovered its detrimental effects on organisational outcomes (Kim *et al.*, 2017). The above discussion sets the stage to study work engagement as a mediator between organisational politics and academic performance. Therefore, the study hypothesised that:

*H2: Work engagement will mediate between perception of organisational politics and academic performance.*

## **b. Perceived Supervisor Support as a Moderator**

A supervisor's role is undeniably like a manager-subordinate in a non-academic context because the doctoral students conduct their research under his/her supervision. In the workplace, managers influence the employees' performance. Similarly, the academic performance of doctoral students is influenced by the supervisor (Khuram *et al.*, 2021). The supervisor-student relationship plays a significant role in the timely completion of the doctoral degree and the quality of research produced by the student (Golde, 2005; Nisula, 2015). It means every stage of the PhD journey, from proposal making to defending, data collection and analysis, publishing paper to final defence, are all critical stages for which a doctoral student depends on the supervisor's support.

While Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS) has been extensively studied in relation to employee outcomes, its impact on the academic performance of doctoral students has not been thoroughly explored. Existing research, including Maetrz *et al.* (2007), primarily focuses on PSS in the context of employee outcomes, such as turnover intentions and behaviors. Additionally, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) have shown that supportive supervisors lead to favourable employee and organisational outcomes, including enhanced performance. Consequently, the literature generally supports a positive correlation between perceived supervisor support and both in-role and extra-role performance of employees, as discussed by Olson and Borman (1989). However, the specific influence of PSS on doctoral students remains an area for further investigation. This discussion highlights the importance of the moderating role of PSS to mitigate the



impact of organisational politics on work engagement, thus reducing its indirect effect on students' academic performance. Therefore, the study hypothesised that:

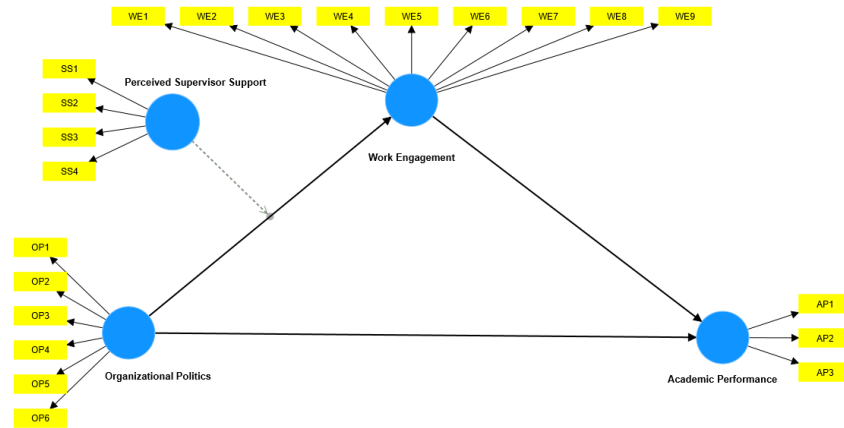
*H3: Perceived supervisor support will mitigate the negative impact of perception of organisational politics on work engagement.*

*H4: Organisational politics will have conditional indirect effects on academic performance such that these effects will be low for students perceiving high vs (low) supervisor support.*

### **3. BROADEN-AND-BUILD THEORY**

The 'Broaden-and-Build Theory' implies that positive emotions such as love, joy, contentment, and positive moods help build personal resources due to broadening an individual's thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson, 2004). The idea behind positive emotional states is that positive emotions expand the attentional focus (Derryberry and Tucker, 1994). Contrarily, a negative emotional state, such as fear, anxiety, and stress, restricts attentional focus (Easterbrook, 1959). According to Derryberry and Tucker (1994, p. 307), 'people experiencing certain negative emotions tend to miss the forest for the trees.' Similarly, positive affect broadens the scope of an individual's cognition (Isen, 1987). Experimental studies also supported that positive emotional states enhance learning by building intellectual resources (Masters *et al.*, 1979). It is important to note that social resources developed due to social bonds or interrelationships also play a significant role in coping with challenging situations. In short, positive, and negative emotions define an individual's adaptability and coping strategy, leading to accomplishing work-related goals either favourably or unfavourably (Denovan and Macaskill, 2017).

Vigour is required at a workplace that motivates workers to utilise their energies and full potential positively, as it 'broadens the scope of cognition and enables flexible and creative thinking to come up with solutions for work-related problems' (Shirom, 2011). Engaged employees display a positive energy and attitude towards their work goals, which helps create additional resources for their benefit and the organisation. Hobfoll (2002) claimed that when a worker's performance at the workplace is directly proportional to resources given to him/her, s/he is more motivated towards work and the well-being of co-workers. Engaged individuals are willing to expand their efforts of their assigned tasks and want to break the traditional boundaries due to the discretionary effort (Rich *et al.*, 2010). Though organisational politics literature suggests that engaged employees are more focused on consuming their resources for work-related outcomes than politics (Guo *et al.*, 2019), the literature remains unanswered about how organisational politics affect doctoral students' work engagement and academic performance.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**

Source: Authors' own.

#### 4. MATERIAL AND METHODS

**Sample Size and Selection Criteria:** Higher education universities of Pakistan are recognised by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), an autonomous and constitutionally established body for monitoring, regulating, and funding higher education efforts in Pakistan (HEC, 2022). The authors randomly selected ten public universities listed by the HEC and based in Islamabad, established under the charter of the Government of Pakistan. The selected universities offer graduate / doctoral studies in general disciplines, such as Management, Marketing, Economics, International Relations, Leadership and Management, Islamic Studies, Health Studies, Engineering, Humanities, and Computer Science. After explaining the purpose of the study and seeking prior permission from the management of concerned universities, 500 questionnaires (50 questionnaires per university) we distributed to voluntary participants.

**Inclusion Criteria:** The inclusion criteria was that the participant should be a doctoral student who had passed the comprehensive exam and working on PhD proposal or authoring a research paper along with the thesis prior to foreign evaluation. The tenure of the doctoral student in the university should be less than five years.

**Common Method Bias:** Multisource data was collected to mitigate the effects of common method variance and enhance causal inference, following the approach suggested by Podsakoff *et al.* (2012). Questionnaires were distributed to supervisors, who then gathered data from their supervisees. The completed questionnaires were sealed in envelopes provided and returned by the participants, as outlined by Brown *et al.* (2002).

## Organisational Politics Perceptions, Doctoral Students' Engagement and Performance

Each supervisee's PhD supervisor was then asked to assess and rate their academic performance and return the survey.

At the first data collection point (Time 1, T1), supervisees evaluated their perceptions of organisational politics, work engagement, and perceived supervisor support. Three months later, at the second data collection point (Time 2, T2), supervisors rated their supervisees' academic performance. This process yielded responses from 108 supervisors, each overseeing 3 to 5 doctoral students, maintaining a 1:4 supervisor-to-student ratio. Data for Time 1 was collected in July 2022, and for Time 2 in October 2022. Out of 500 distributed questionnaires, 432 were returned, resulting in an overall response rate of 86.4% with fully matched responses.

## 5. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### a. Respondents Profiling

223 male (52%) and 209 (48%) female doctoral students, with ages ranging from 25 to 40 years, participated in the study (Table 1):

**Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Demographics**

Variables	Mean	SD	Variance	Min	Max	%	Freq
<b>Age</b>	2.87	7.8	.398	1	3		
25-30						47.22	204
30-35						38.19	165
35-40						14.58	63
<b>Total</b>						100	432
<b>Gender</b>	1.45	1.386	1.723	1	4		
Male						54.39	235
Female						45.60	197
<b>Total</b>						100	432
<b>Employment Status</b>	3.69	.991	.985	1	4		
Employed						53.93	233
Unemployed						28.93	125
Scholarship- holders						17.12	74
<b>Total</b>						100	432

Source: Authors own calculations.

**b. Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4, a structural equation modeling tool effective for estimating complex models through multivariate analysis, as suggested by Magno *et al.* (2022). This tool is particularly suitable for small sample sizes and non-normal data, utilizing a two-step approach comprising the measurement model and the structural model for hypothesis testing, as outlined by Al-Dhaafri *et al.* (2016). A key advantage of PLS-SEM is its flexibility in data analysis, not requiring prior assumptions about data distribution. This makes it effective for smaller sample sizes and capable of handling single-item constructs. Unlike Covariance-Based SEM (CB-SEM), PLS-SEM does not require data normality, allowing for a broader application in research and data analysis with enhanced statistical power, as noted by Cassel *et al.* (1999) and Thiele *et al.* (2015).

**c. Measures**

The study utilised structured questionnaires with adapted, established scales for data collection. Organizational politics were measured using a 6-item scale from Hochwarter *et al.* (2003), asking participants to rate their perceptions of political activities at their university. Work engagement was assessed with a shortened Utrecht Work Engagement Scale–9 (UWES-9) by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006). Perceived supervisor support was evaluated using a 4-item scale adapted from Eisenberger *et al.* (2002), with ‘organisation’ replaced by ‘supervisor.’ Academic performance was measured using a 3-item scale from Williams and Anderson (1991). All items were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with all scales showing high reliability (Cronbach’s alpha > 0.90) and significant outer loadings (> 0.70,  $p < .01$ ). All measurement scales were assessed for reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity with satisfactory results.

**d. Measurement Model**

*Cronbach’s Alpha:* The reliability coefficient is Cronbach’s alpha which ranges from 0 to 1. All scales were found adequate for reliability and composite reliability with Cronbach’s values greater than 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2013).

*Average Variance Extracted (AVE):* Convergent validity was established through AVE (average variance extracted) with satisfactory results; for example, AVE was greater than 0.50 with significant cross-loadings. The criterion for establishing AVE is that half the variance should be explained by the factors of their respective indicators (Hock and Ringle 2006). See Table 2:

**Table 2: Reliability Test**

<b>Latent Variables</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Composite Reliability</b>	<b>Average Variance Extracted</b>
Organisational Politics	OP1	0.905	0.932	0.943	0.746
	OP2	0.871			
	OP3	0.845			
	OP4	0.898			
	OP5	0.863			
	OP6	0.794			
Work Engagement	WE1	0.880	0.930	0.941	0.826
	WE2	0.863			
	WE3	0.854			
	WE4	0.838			
	WE5	0.860			
	WE6	0.846			
	WE7	0.858			
	WE8	0.851			
Perceived Supervisor Support	PSS1	0.919	0.948	0.957	0.733
	PSS2	0.917			
	PSS3	0.899			
	PSS4	0.899			
Academic Performance	AP1	0.943	0.945	0.962	0.901
	AP2	0.912			
	AP3	0.991			

Source: Authors own calculations.

***e. Correlation Matrix and Discriminant Validity***

In the structural model, discriminant validity was established through AVE's square root, which was found to be higher than correlations among the constructs. Discriminant validity was confirmed through Fornell and Larker (1981) criteria as well as the HTMT

ratio, yielding satisfying results (Ringle *et al.*, 2015). See Table 3 for correlation matrix and discriminant validity results:

**Table 3: Correlation Matrix and Discriminant Validity**  
**Fornell-Larcker Criterion**

	OP	WE	PSS	AP
Organisational Politics (OP)	<b>0.864</b>			
Work Engagement (WE)	-0.720	<b>0.856</b>		
Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS)	-0.717	0.796	<b>0.909</b>	
Academic Performance (AP)	-0.786	0.780	0.796	<b>0.949</b>

**Source:** Authors' own calculations.

**Note:** Bold values are the square root of AVE (Average Variance Extracted) to establish discriminant validity, which should be higher than the construct's respective correlation with all other constructs.

#### *f. Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing*

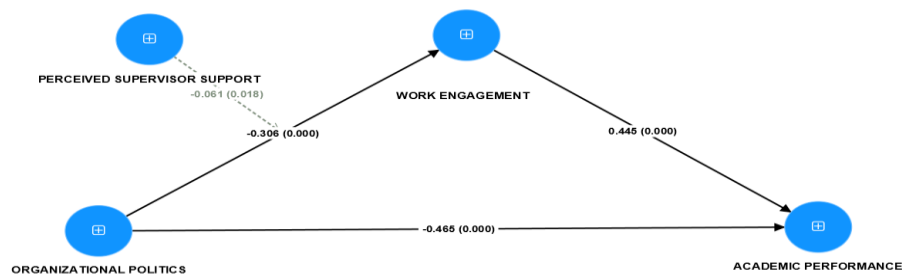
Variance Inflation Factor (VIF): VIF results revealed no threat of multicollinearity with all values within the range. See Table 4 for collinearity statistics:

**Table 4: Collinearity Statistics**

	Work Engagement	Academic Performance
Organisational Politics	2.058	2.077
Work Engagement	-	2.074
Perceived Supervisor Support	2.059	-
Organisational Politics x Perceived Supervisor Support	1.004	

Source: Authors' own calculations.

**Figure 2: Path Coefficients**



Source: Authors' own.

## Organisational Politics Perceptions, Doctoral Students' Engagement and Performance

*PLS Algorithm and Bootstrapping:* The hypotheses were evaluated by running the PLS algorithm and bootstrapping. The path analysis of the structural model (as shown in Figure 2) significantly indicates the negative effect of organisational politics perception on academic performance ( $\beta = -0.465$ ,  $t = 10.686$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting hypothesis 1 (see Table 5 for structural model results):

**Table 5: Research Hypotheses and Testing**

Hypothesised Path (Inner Model)	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV)	P Values	Decision
<b>DIRECT EFFECTS</b>						
Organisational Politics - > Academic Performance ( <b>H<sub>1</sub></b> )	-0.465	-0.465	0.044	10.686	0.000	supported
Organisational Politics - > Work Engagement	-0.306	-0.304	0.06	5.129	0.000	
Perceived Supervisor Support -> Work Engagement	0.572	0.573	0.057	10.035	0.000	
Work Engagement -> Academic Performance	0.445	0.445	0.045	9.819	0.000	
Perceived Supervisor Support X Organisational Politics - > Work Engagement ( <b>H<sub>3</sub></b> )	-0.061	-0.062	0.026	2.361	0.018	supported
<b>SPECIFIC INDIRECT EFFECTS</b>						
Perceived Supervisor Support -> Work Engagement -> Academic Performance	0.255	0.255	0.037	6.857	0.000	supported
Perceived Supervisor Support x Organisational Politics -> Work Engagement -> Academic Performance ( <b>H<sub>4</sub></b> )	-0.027	-0.027	0.012	2.269	0.023	
Organisational Politics - > Work Engagement -> Academic Performance ( <b>H<sub>2</sub></b> )	-0.136	-0.136	0.031	4.451	0.000	supported

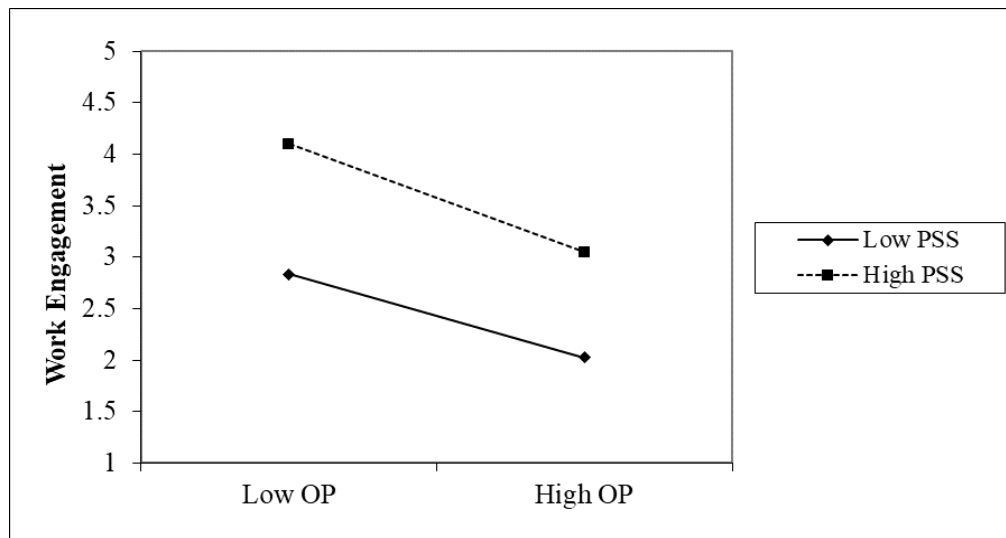
Source: Authors' own

*Mediation Analysis:* Mediation analysis was done using bootstrapping method with 5000 resamples. The results indicate indirect effects of organisational politics on work engagement ( $\beta = -0.306$ ,  $t = 5.129$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and on academic performance through

work engagement ( $\beta = -0.136$ ,  $t = 4.451$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), depicting a partial mediation and supporting hypothesis 2.

*Moderation Analysis:* Results also indicated that the interaction effect of perceived supervisor support with organisational politics buffers the effect of organisational politics on work engagement ( $\beta = -0.061$ ,  $t = 2.361$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ), which supported hypothesis 3. Similarly, conditional indirect effects of organisational politics on academic performance due to moderated mediation of perceived supervisor support and work engagement becomes weak ( $\beta = -0.027$ ,  $t = 2.269$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ), thus supporting hypothesis 4 (see Figure 3 for moderating effect):

**Figure 3: Moderating Effect**



Source: Authors' own.

*Predictive Relevance of the Model:* Then  $R^2$  (the coefficient of determination) was assessed for explained variance in the endogenous variables by exogenous variables showing values of 68% and 71%, respectively (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2014) [see Table 6 for variance explained results]:

**Table 6: Variance Explained**

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Work Engagement	0.687	0.685
Academic Performance	0.713	0.711

Source: Authors' own calculations.



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Finally, values of  $f^2$  effect size demonstrated strong effects of organisational politics and work engagement on academic performance, but weak effect of organisational politics on work engagement (see Table 7 for effect sizes):

**Table 7: Effect Size**

	Academic Performance	Work Engagement
Organisational Politics	0.362	0.098
Work Engagement	0.332	
Perceived Supervisor Support		0.509
Organisational Politics x Perceived Supervisor Support		0.012

Source: Authors own calculations.

*Note:* Effect size criteria are as follows: Weak = 0.02; Medium = 0.15; Strong = 0.35

## 6. DISCUSSION

The 'Broaden-and-Build Theory' suggests that human adaptation depends on positive and negative emotions. Positive emotions broaden and build cognitive resources, thus enhancing adaptability by enabling individuals to face stressful situations (Fredrickson, 2004). This broadening of individual resources not only affects their current well-being but also trains them to face similar situations in the future. The growth in positive coping resources results in long-term outcomes, such as flourishing, sustainability and adaptability according to the contextual requirements (Denovan and Macaskill, 2017).

In this regard, the study's findings align with the postulates of the 'Broaden-and-Build Theory', demonstrating that stress caused by perceiving organisational politics can be mitigated with Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS) acting as a buffer. The findings indicate that the stress associated with the perception of organisational politics affects the engagement of doctoral students with their studies by affecting their cognitive resources. Such negative effects, in turn, are also destructive to their academic performance. The findings also show that perceiving supervisor support builds cognitive resources by generating positive emotions, which help cope with the stress and enhance the student's work engagement, thus, their academic performance.

In a similar vein, highly engaged individuals display joyful and enthusiastic attitude toward their work fueled by positive emotions, thus are open to challenges, foster innovation due to an open-minded and optimistic approach to work without compromising their well-being (Gutermann *et al.*, 2017).

A key strength of this study is its focus on the work engagement of doctoral students, an area that has been less explored compared to research on workplace employees based on

the job demands-resources model. A possible explanation for the positive impact of work engagement on academic performance, despite organisational politics, is the time-bound nature of doctoral programmes and the future job prospects linked to their successful and timely completion. Doctoral students often perceive time constraints as an impediment to their academic performance. Additionally, since their tenure at the university is temporary, increased engagement in their research projects can help them navigate and overcome both prevalent issues and departmental challenges. Engaging deeply with their thesis can lead to positive outcomes like satisfaction with their research, learning new skills, and receiving appreciation from supervisors. This, in turn, aids in their personal development and adaptation to the university environment, enabling them to achieve their academic goals. To enhance a culture of engagement, universities can implement procedures to assess the engagement level of the students, how frequently they attend meetings with the supervisor and progress in the research publications and conference presentations. These indicators help assess and define a plan to enhance student's engagement level. The results of the study indicate that a doctoral student's academic performance could be positively affected by work engagement, despite organisational politics. Supervisor support also plays a significant role in strengthening the relationship between academic performance and work engagement.

Organisational politics, a recognised workplace stressor, can lead to strain and affect individuals differently based on their coping strategies. The way individuals perceive and respond to political behavior in the workplace can vary, ranging from constructive to destructive reactions, depending on their stress levels. Research, including that of Harris and Kacmar (2005), suggests that organisational politics is generally perceived negatively. In a university context, the supervisor-supervisee relationship is crucial, especially in mitigating the negative impacts of organisational politics. Doctoral students' direct interactions with their supervisors play a significant role, as evidenced in literature. For instance, Liden *et al.* (2014) have shown that supervisors can positively influence their subordinates' performance, while Harris *et al.* (2007) indicate potential negative impacts. Consequently, supervisor support is not only a valuable resource for enhancing students' performance but also a key factor in helping them navigate and counteract the threats posed by organisational politics.

Similar to employees in an unsafe work environment where organisational politics are rampant, employees often consider quitting (Burakova *et al.*, 2022) due to dissatisfaction and perform poorly when they perceive a lack of justice (Asrar-ul-Haq *et al.*, 2019). This sense of insecurity also affects students in a university setting, where the perception of politics can harm their academic performance and even lead them to consider abandoning their degree programme. In such scenarios, the support of a supervisor becomes crucial, playing a significant role in bolstering student engagement and countering the negative effects of such political dynamics. The findings of this study corroborate previous

research on employees in India (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2018) and in the United States (Harris and Kacmar 2005). Similarly, other studies, such as Pohl *et al.* (2022), have highlighted the mediating role of work engagement, specifically in the context of nursing professionals.

In a university setting, competition for faculty promotion depends on producing quality research, getting published in Impact Factor journals, and the number of PhD students supervised. This competition also has associated costs for students' academic performance as this matter intensifies in case of proposal defence and internal evaluation of the thesis by reviewers, who could be the direct competitors of the supervisee's supervisor for promotion, which may affect the duration of the degree completion and overall research quality along with the perceptions of students about organisational politics. Such perception of organisational politics also affects the student's work engagement, such as vigour, dedication, and absorption, which in turn affect their academic performance. Therefore, enhancing students' work engagement with the research project gains importance.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The findings conclude that organisational politics negatively affects the academic performance of doctoral students in higher education universities, and their personal engagement with research. Work engagement determines an individual's performance and affecting work engagement may also indirectly affect academic performance. However, the findings also suggest that perceived supervisor support work as a buffering variable. It not only buffers the impact of organisational politics on work engagement but also helps reduce its indirect effects on academic performance through partial mediation of work engagement. In this context, the role of the university becomes crucial in facilitating and encouraging such supervisor support, ensuring a healthy academic environment that counters the adverse effects of organisational politics. Future research should employ a mixed methodological approach to discover relevant knowledge and clarify the causation among study variables as well as the mediating role of knowledge absorptive capacity of the student between the perception of organisational politics and academic performance. At the same time, such research could also investigate the moderating role of students' personality traits, such as uncertainty avoidance, to understand the phenomenon from a cultural perspective.

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