"Can politics really be beneficial?"
Towards a model for positive politics

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RÉSUMÉ : La politique organisationnelle est au centre de nombreux débats dans la littérature décisionnelle. Durant longtemps, le débat s'est centré sur les effets négatifs du comportement politique et la manière de l'éviter. Plus récemment, un courant de la littérature décrit les effets positifs de ce comportement. Notre article s'inscrit dans cette mouvance. Il met en évidence le lien entre politique organisationnelle, processus de construction de consensus et performance. La relation entre la politique organisationnelle et la recherche d'un consensus est modérée par le changement, afin de tenir compte de l'environnement concurrentiel en mutation. Ce modèle intégrateur, en soulignant l'imbrication des différents concepts, dévoile comment la politique organisationnelle peut avoir un impact positif.

Mots-clés : Stratégie, prise de décision, consensus, politique organisationnelle

ABSTRACT: Organizational politics has been at the center of many debates in decision-making literature. For a long time, the debate focused on the negative effects of political behavior and how to avoid it. This article, however, contributes to the increasing amount of literature that focuses on the *positive* effects of political behavior. This article is centered around the impact of organizational politics on the consensus-building process and its relationship with performance. The relationship between organizational politics and consensus-building is also moderated by change to reflect the ever-increasing reality of the changing business environment. The article proposes an integrative model demonstrating how these constructs relate to each other and how politics can have a positive impact.

Keywords: Strategy, decision-making, consensus, organizational politics

INTRODUCTION

The best politics is no politics.

– Henry M. Jackson

This quotation of Henry M. Jackson—a US congressman and senator—exemplifies the general attitude towards organizational politics. Organizational politics is widely considered to be the "evil" in the organizational decision-making process, as the series House of Cards demonstrates magnificently. If one were to ask people at random whether they consider themselves rational or political, the majority would deny being political in their professional life (Schnellenbach et al, 2015). Nobody wants to be associated with behavior that society considers to be deviant. This might, however, seem paradoxical because, on closer inspection, people seem to be highly political (Buchanan & Badham, 2008). This immediate negative reaction and denial stems from the general perception that organizational politics leads to a corrupt and power dominated decision-making process, and nobody wants to be associated with that. Indeed, a lack of clarity surrounding the concept reinforces this phenomenon (Bacharach & Lawler, 1998). Political behavior is a modern hydra: as more research is conducted on the topic, more definitions and nuances are created and identified. Research on this topic also has deep historic roots and is by no means a recent endeavor (Ferris et al, 2019). Current insights build further on breakthroughs in political science, organisational sociology and economics (Burns, 1961; Crozier, Friedberg, 1977; Dahl, 1964; March, 1962;) More recently, research into organizational decision-making has focused on several potential problematic issues associated with politics in organizational decision-making, such as: conflict and understanding (Franke & Foerstl, 2018); creativity and propitiousness (Elbanna et al, 2017); performance (Elbanna & Child, 2007; Olson et al, 2014; Chang et al, 2009); product development (Weissenberger-Eibl & Teufel, 2011); success (Lampaki & Papadakis, 2018); and commitment (Jain & Ansari, 2018). As such, organizational politics can be considered as an important driver in organizational decision-making and more research is needed in order to better understand its influences (Butcher & Clarke, 1999).

Over the last decade, new research has sought to better understand this link between organizational politics and decision-making. This trend was a conscious reaction against the

"traditional" way of viewing organizational politics, which has been so focused on its negative effects. This new research argues that organizational politics does not necessarily have to have negative influences; indeed, it can even have positive effects (Albrecht & Landells, 2012; Lux et al, 2008; Shepherd et al, 2019; Soares, 2018). These studies have shown that, despite the extensive output of research into its negative effects, organizational politics does not have to be negative by default in terms of the decision-making process and outcome. Eldor, for example, came to the conclusion that an environment that is perceived to be political encourages more information sharing and more proactive and creative decision-making processes (Eldor, 2017). Landells and Albrecht argued that one cannot have a one-size-fits-all perception of politics as negative; people have different perceptions and the established frameworks must be revisited (Landells & Albrecht, 2016).

This article seeks to explore how politics can enhance strategic consensus in groups and thus improve performance in the team. The magnitude of this question cannot be underestimated. In a 1980 survey Murray & Gandz found that 90% of their sample said that organisational politics on the work floor was commonplace, Buchanan concluded that 30 years later that this percentage had remained constant (Buchanan & Badham, 2008; Murray & Gandz, 1980). So organisational politics is a reality we cannot deny, and it has effects on e.g. performance, stress, organisational justice, aggressive behaviour (Bedi & Schat, 2013). This all indicates that we need to have larger insights into how organisational politics is influencing other variables and how we need to approach the construct itself. Working on that, our research subscribes to the "positive" politics research stream. The result of this investigation is a new theoretical model with adjusted propositions that describe the relationships between the concepts. This push towards a new theoretical model derives from several gaps in the theoretical development of organizational politics. Firstly, the link between strategic consensus decision-making and organizational politics, which has not yet been researched in the literature, can provide new theoretical and practical viewpoints for future research (Elbanna 2018). Another new element is the effect of change. Change will be presented as a moderator in the relationship between political behavior and strategic consensus, which will allow us to integrate the dynamic aspect of the external environment.

The ultimate aim is that all these factors combined in the model described, can add to and broaden this relatively new area of research into positive politics and further demonstrate its value as a research avenue (Landells & Albrecht, 2017).

POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

Organizational politics is not an unusual and recent phenomenon. In Roman times Seneca incorporated already political behavioral elements in his studies (Griffin, 1976). Machiavelli later described this political behaviour in a striking way during the Middle Ages: "*men rise from one ambition to another: first they seek to secure themselves against attack and then they attack others*" (Machiavelli, 2009). In fact, most organizations can be seen as political spaces (Mintzberg, 1985). These organizations themselves also do not operate in a vacuum, they are themselves also political actors in a certain way (Hansen & Kuepper, 2009). For this article the treatment of the political aspects of the organization will be out of scope and the focus will be instead on the individual and the team. Despite the prominence of the phenomenon, each article that examines the topic of political behavior and organizational politics faces the dauting task of answering the question: "What is organizational politics?" Several authors have tried to reach a definition that encompasses its multiple aspects (see Table 1). Elbanna's definition, for example, focuses on "intentional forms of behavior associated with the use of power and influence in order to serve the own interests of decision-makers or these of the organization" (Elbanna, 2018). This definition combines several aspects, such as power and influencing tactics, but is centered around employee self-interest. Mueller's definition, on the other hand, stresses the socio-political elements that impact the decision-making process, more specifically that "decision-makers do excessive formal analysis for the purpose of persuasion and communication" (Mueller et al, 2007*)*. Yet another angle is emphasized by Eldor, who describes it as "employee behavior that uses power strategically to achieve outcomes and maximize self-interests, which do not necessarily match the organization's goals" (Eldor, 2017). This perspective differs from Elbanna's definition in that it specifically points to the employees in the organization. Another interpretation is that of Kacmar et al, which focuses on the perceptions of the employee. They measure "the degree to which participants perceive a political and self-serving culture within their work environment" (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997; Salimäki & Jämsén, 2010; Thornton et al., 2016). The central aspect here is how the employees

perceive the environment around them, rather than identifying whether the environment is truly political. Another stream focuses on the centrality of power in organizational politics. This stream defines organizational politics/political behavior in the following way: "the occurrence of certain forms of behavior associated with the use of power or influence" (Gandz & Murray, 1980; Geppert et al, 2016). This approach focuses heavily on how power influences the whole decision-making process. Finally, a further stream examines the role of politics with a strong focus on the centrality of a system. This approach considers how resources are divided in the system and the part politics plays in the division process. In this last stream, the bargaining power of the decision-makers in the organization is the focal point. Authors in this research trend are Child et al (2010) and Pfeffer and Salancik (1974).

Article	Definition	Aspects
Gandz & Murray, 1980	*The occurrence of certain forms of behavior associated with the use of power or influence*	- Power - Influencing tactics
Kacmar & Carlson, 1997	*The degree to which participants perceive a political and self-serving culture within their work environment*	- Focus on employee's perception
Mueller et al, 2007	*Decision-makers do excessive formal analysis for the purpose of persuasion and communication*	- Socio-political process
Eldor, 2017	*Employee behavior that uses power strategically to achieve outcomes and maximize self-interests*	- Power - Self-interest of the employees
Elbanna, 2018	*Intentional forms of behavior associated with the use of power and influence in order to serve the own interests of decision-makers or these of the organization*	- Power - Influencing tactics - Self-interest of the decision-makers or of organization

Table 1: Definitions of political behavior

This article builds further on the research stream that focuses on the employee's self-interests, that is "*intentional forms of employee behavior associated with the use of strategical power and influence in order to achieve outcomes and maximize self-interests of decision-makers, which*

do not necessarily match the organization's goals" (Eldor 2017). As emphasized by this definition, the focal point of our research will be the employee and their self-serving actions. This definition links also up with a more recent approach where political behaviour is seen as a more holistic phenomenon and not solely focused on certain tactics (Liu et al, 2010). It is also important to note the distinction between outcomes and the maximization of self-interests because the outcomes of political behavior are not necessarily in the interest of the employee. Finally, the definition stresses the fact that the self-interests of the employees do not always align with the desired outcomes of the organization; the aims of both parties can be congruent, but they can also be totally different.

STRATEGIC CONSENSUS

The second key construct in this research is strategic consensus. Strategic consensus has been used in many studies, either as an outcome variable or as an influencing variable. Examples of this include: influencing or building/creating factors which form the strategic consensus (Desmidt & George, 2016; Roberto, 2004); the effect of social environment on strategic consensus (Bliese & Britt, 2001; Kellermans et al, 2005; Ranganathan et al, 2018); the impact of means and objectives on strategic consensus (Bourgeois, 1980); the effect of strategic consensus on performance (Bragaw & Misangyi, 2017; Mach & Baruch, 2015; Kellermans et al, 2011, 2013; Homburg et al, 2015); the effect of strategic consensus on effectiveness (Boyer & McDermott, 1999; Ho et al, 2014); the effect of involvement of the workforce in strategic consensus-building (Poitras & Bowen, 2002); the effect of strategic consensus on group decision-making (Wu et al, 2019); the relationship between strategic consensus and leadership (Ates et al, 2018; Weller et al, 2019); and strategic consensus and cognitive processes (Combe & Carrington, 2015).

In this model, strategic consensus will be used as an outcome and influencing variable, specifically the effect of political behavior on strategic consensus and the effect of strategic consensus on the performance of an organization. The effect of political behavior on strategic consensus has not yet been studied and therefore adds a new element to the scientific research. The following paragraphs will examine the influences on and effects of strategic consensus in order to gain a better insight into the effects of strategic consensus. To better understand the

concept of strategic consensus, it is also useful to analyze the literature through a content-processing framework. This framework covers the way in which strategic consensus is defined and shared and how strategic consensus is formed.

Strategic consensus is a concept that can be understood in several different ways. Take, for example, cultural consensus: this focuses on norms in a setting and whether these are shared by the different people within the setting (Chatman et al, 2014). Consensus can also be considered in the light of shared agreement, or the degree of the consensus. A group can have a consensus on a topic but do nothing. This illustrates that it is not always sufficient enough to just have a consensus on a particular strategy. Bowman and Ambrosini label this "positive" and "negative" consensus (Bowman & Ambrosini, 1997). For the consensus to have a focused effect on performance, a positive consensus is needed. Another way of analyzing the degree of consensus is to examine the different levels of agreement or disagreement between the team members (Moral et al, 2017), while a further variant analyzes the degree of consensus by considering the intensity of the preferences expressed (Gonzalez-Arteaga et al, 2016). Desmidt and George tackle consensus from yet another angle. They observe how the *content* of consensus is influenced by internal communication in vertical units and argue that the content is multifaceted: it is the result of interactions between the different sub-groups that form the group (Desmidt & George, 2016). As such, to better understand the content of the strategic consensus, the interpretation of a strategic consensus should also take into account the vertical communication in the organization (Desmidt & George, 2016). Another perspective on the content of consensus is "what" we have a consensus about in the group decision-making process. The content of a decision (i.e., the objective) or the way of arriving at that decision (i.e., the means) has been extensively researched, and this research has delivered contradicting results. Authors such as Bourgeois found that consensus on both aspects is important, but consensus on means is necessary for improved performance (Bourgeois, 1980; Meschnig & Kaufmann, 2015). Kellermans, on the other hand, states that agreement on objective is more significant because it focuses on the higher principles that inform the organizational strategy and thus allows for a certain flexibility in how the objective is achieved (Camelo et al, 2010; Kellermans et al, 2005, 2013). In an effort to resolve this contradiction, further research has argued that both elements are present simultaneously: consensus on means, mediated by consensus on objectives, has a direct influence on performance (Gonzalez-Benito et al, 2012).

The integration of these two conceptualizations (means and objectives) of consensus illustrates that the way in which we choose to understand strategic consensus will affect how we explain its impact on other variables.

The second element in the framework is the process perspective, that is, how consensus is arrived at. This element also provides several angles through which to analyze consensus. Two important aspects have to be considered in the process context. Firstly, consensus can either be treated solely as an outcome of the group process or as an integral part of the group process. Kellermans (Kellermans et al, 2011,2013), for example, treats consensus as an outcome and does not take into account the whole group decision-making process. Other authors, however, do consider how a group comes to an agreement about a certain subject (Maturo & Ventre, 2010; Roberto, 2004; Ates et al, 2018). This focus on the intra-group process highlights the nuances that exist in a group decision-making process. It reinforces the fact that consensus is not an unified concept that arises suddenly within a group process, but is a result of human characteristics, human interaction, and human actions (Pérez et al, 2018). Maturo and Ventre take this view to explain how group members come to "not too different opinions" (Maturo & Ventre, 2010) by producing a statistical model that represents the flux and change of opinions. The most interesting aspect of their research is that they investigate how personal positions change, the formation of workable coalitions, and the dynamic aspect of strategic consensus.

In fact, their findings stress that this whole process is dynamic. Knight et al. analyzes the process of consensus-building from a wider perspective, considering how demographics and two cognitive processes (conflict and agreement searching) influence consensus-building (Knight et al., 1999). Combe and Carrington build on these cognitive processes in relation to consensus-building within groups, with a particular focus on sensemaking. They found that a mental model was developed by each team member and that a consensus was formed based on this cognitive model, but this in the different organizational management teams (Combe & Carrington, 2015). Roberto does not see cognitive and symbolic processes as exclusive, there is both a cognitive and a symbolic process at the same time (Roberto, 2004). Top management Groups (TMT) thus have to overcome both processes to reach a consensus with greater efficiency.

Another aspect that is crucial in the process of strategic consensus-building is the influence of both intra- and inter-group consensus. The research of Desmidt and George mentioned above has already touched on this topic. "Intra-group consensus-building" refers to the consensus-building process that occurs between group members and does not include the influence of other groups (Dong & Xu, 2015). This has long been the most prominent area of research for strategic consensus-building (Ates et al, 2018). More recently, however, research has pointed to the importance of inter-group influences on the consensus-building process (Kellermans et al, 2005; Ates et al, 2018). A particular focus has been on the cross-functional/level influence in manufacturing processes (Feger, 2014; Zanon et al, 2013; Meschnig & Kaufmann, 2015). These studies have proven that there are certain processes (namely, cross-functional teams, Employee Resource Programs, and improved communication) that exert influence on an enterprise's strategic consensus on objectives and means (Feger, 2014).
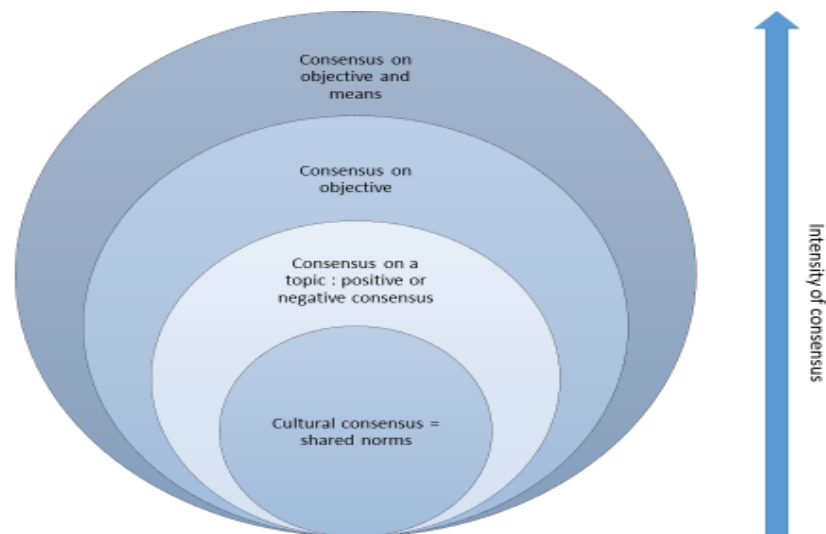

Figure 1: Intensity of consensus

The above discussion demonstrates that the concept of consensus covers a wide variety of processes and viewpoints and that this results in different definitions of *strategic* consensus (Kellermans et al, 2005). This discussion also demonstrates that consensus has varying degrees of intensity (see Figure 1). The scale of the intensity of consensus begins with a consensus on cultural norms as the most basic level, which does not in itself suggest an agreement on any

particular subject. Next is the consensus on a subject, then a consensus on the objective of an enterprise and, finally, consensus on both objectives and the means through which to achieve these objectives.

In this article, we follow a broad definition of consensus and build on the definition from Dess and Priem: "*Consensus is the level of agreement among the TMT or dominant coalition on factors such as goals, competitive methods, and perceptions of the environment*" (Dess & Priem, 1995). This definition not only focuses on the level of agreement among the TMT teams but also makes a clear distinction between goals, methods, and the perception of the environment. This understanding thus allows for more granular research and deeper insights into strategic consensus. As such, this definition subscribes to the mixed approach of content and means, as studied by Gonzalez-Benito et al. (2012) and other studies (Homburg et al, 1999). Further, the definition focuses on the intra-group decision-making process. For this article, therefore, we did not take into account the research strand that includes inter-group consensus-building in the decision-making process.

THEORETICAL MODEL

The concepts introduced above are not standalone concepts in the decision-making literature; rather, they are always linked to other decision-making concepts such as performance, decision quality, and decision speed. Therefore, we now introduce new relationships between some of these constructs and integrate them into a new theoretical model to come to a better understanding of how politics impacts an organization.
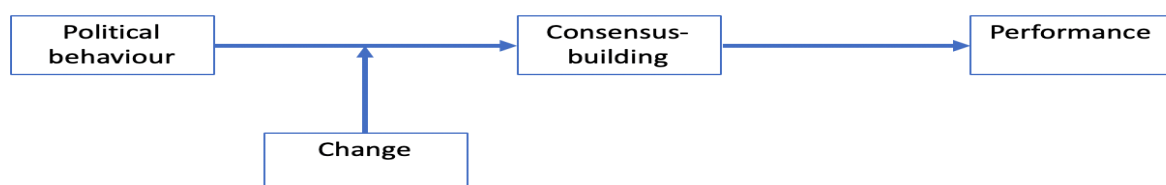

Figure 2: Synthetic model

This model (see Figure 2) aims to be a starting point for an integrated model on the effects of political behavior on consensus-building. The advantage of this model is that it combines several rich research traditions in such a way that it signifies a leap forward in positive politics

research. This was inspired by calls from the decision-making literature that research should create models that combine several research streams and so become holistic representations of different decision-making research streams (Elbanna & Child, 2007; Rajagopalan et al, 1993). The remainder of the article explains the relationships between the constructs in further detail.

POLITICAL BEHAVIOR AND CONSENSUS-BUILDING

The first key relationship is between political behavior and strategic consensus. This article is one of the first attempts not only to link these two constructs but to attempt to understand the relationship between them. As described above, political behavior is "traditionally" seen as having a negative influence on many aspects of the strategic decision-making process (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Albrecht & Landells, 2012). In this article, we go beyond this "traditional" assumption and examine the conditions in which political behavior can positively influence the consensus-building process. Despite the extremely limited research in this area, some literature has demonstrated how political behavior can positively influence the consensus-building process.

First, political behavior could allow improved coordination and flow of information (Kreutzer et al, 2015; Simon, 1997). A good flow of information is necessary for groups to come to a mutual agreement on a topic (Cacciattolo, 2014; Camelo et al, 2010). On the other hand, it is not innocent, as such James March correctly described (March, 1988). One has to see the nuance in it and understand the information politics. Once every party in the decision-making process has the necessary information, they are able to review it and potentially change their position within the group debate, either towards consensus or not. Prior to that, elements such as the quality of the information flow, the quantity and how it is reviewed need to be taken into account when looking at these information flows, because they have a large impact into how a decision is made and they might be impeded by political activity (Kapoutsis & Thanos, 2016). This refers to the search and information evaluation of organisational decision-making frameworks (Csaszar & Eggers, 2013). In the "negotiations" between the parties, the reception and search for information can be alternately seen through the light of what Zajonc (1955) calls cognitive tuning. The political context will cause a different cognitive structure for the receivers

and the transmitters of the information. Transmitters will have a cognitive mindset not to disclose all strategic information and receivers will want to have as many information and viewpoints possible from which to select to support their position. This flows further into the quality and quantity of the information. Transmitters will have not necessarily share all information and not necessarily all the "best" information (Davenport, Eccles & Prusak, 1992). The information evaluation itself will also be impacted by the two elements described above. Because parties know the negotiation/political game is played they will also review the received information with this in mind (Lampaki & Papadakis, 2018).

Building on the reasoning above, a first argument for the impact of political behaviour on consensus, is based on what Butcher and Clarke understand about this information flow process as a which they argue is a social/political process and "battles over just causes" (Butcher & Clarke, 1999). Butcher and Clarke reasoning is that, because political behavior within an organization challenges many of the stated arguments, the political process enhances the quality of the argument and the group debate. The process behind this is that the political behaviour allows/creates the opportunity to challenge "established" arguments and leaves them vulnerable for debate and change. This process therefore enables a higher degree of consensus within the group. Of course, during a consensus building process, some groups may be more influential than other (Weick et al, 2005).

A second argument is that organizational political behavior is a counterbalance for individual/managerial political behavior (Kreutzer et al, 2015: Kaplan, 2008). The reasoning here is similar to that above, namely that political behavior pitches one group against another (March, 1962). Thereby preventing the concentration of power/extreme political behavior within one sub-group or individual, which should lead to potential better team performance and coordination. The resulting differences in the set-up of power in the group—i.e., more evenly distributed power—creates a more stable environment in which the group can operate and allows for a stronger consensus-building process. Without the all dominant party, the decision-making process will be more less centralized and be more based on a negotiation between the parties.

A third argument is that political behavior can encourage people to become more involved in setting up the consensus-building process, because they are politically motivated to take part in group decision-making (Poitras & Bowen, 2002). This is a somewhat chicken-egg argument, is it because there is political orientated decision-making that people become more politically engaged or the way around (Ferris et al, 2019). Greater participation challenges the concentration of power in one segment of the group. This because having insights into the power structures and taking part into it provides a better grasp and operational power for the individual members (Hansen & Küpper 2009; Willner, 2011). This greater participation and insights sharpen the need for better arguments and negotiation (Butcher & Clarke, 1999). And in all this reinforces more the need to come to a consensus in the decision-making process to overcome a possible gridlock.

The last argument is that political behavior leads to more efficient negotiations of the usage of scarce resources in the consensus-building process. Within organizations we see several aims and not one unique predestined aim, this opens the potential for conflict and political games between different parties (Reiners, 2008; Willner, 2011).The "political" competition for the scarce resources influences the distribution process, so the resources are part of a political negotiation "game" between the different sub-groups (Buchanan & Badham, 2008; March, 1962). The political behaviour of individuals helps discover resources and stimulates creativity (Liu et al, 2010). Therefore, groups (composed of these individuals) with more efficient negotiations are potentially more able to "win" the resources if they play the political game. This process results in a stronger consensus-building process due to the positive impact of the streamlined influence process, discussed above. This increased efficiency is not necessarily an automatic process, however, as the resources may still go to a group that will use the resources less efficiently, which can result in worse performance (Chang et al, 2009; Olson et al., 2014).

Based on the above, there is sufficient evidence to arrive at the following proposition:
P1: *A high level of political behavior in a team will lead in most cases to a strengthening of the creation of strategic consensus in those teams.*

CONSENSUS IN GROUPS AND PERFORMANCE

The rail transport strike in France, that took place from December 5, 2019 until February 2020, is a striking example of a lack of consensus between the major players in a   decision-making process. While it is too early to assess the total cost of this strike, a similar strike in 2018 cost the French rail transport company SNCF €790 million. At a firm level, therefore, the lack of consensus has a significant impact on at least the financial performance. Performance can be defined and approached in several ways this from financial indicators to brand heat. For this paper the focus is on the team performance and not on the performance of the company, both can be linked but not necessarily. This paper takes the definition of Steiner as a starting point: "*Team performance is either the result of the additive combination of individual members work, reflective of the highest individual performance or constraint to the lowest individual performance*" (Steiner, 1972). With this definition Steiner shows the duality of team performance. Quinn and colleagues introduce another important aspect of team performance, that it is about the goal's clarity and the motivation for goal achievement (Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, & McGrath,1990). For a team to have a good performance there is a need for clear goals to guide individual effort and individual buy-in and confidence in the team effort. The performance definition for this article will then be: "*the additive combination of individual members work based on goal clarity and individual buy-in which can reflect the highest or lowest individual output*".

The literature on the consensus-performance literature still disagrees on the effect of consensus on performance (Ramos-Garza, 2009; Kellermans et al, 2011). Most research points out that a greater degree of consensus has a positive effect on organizational performance and employee satisfaction (Bao et al, 2008; Flood et al, 2000; Hernandez et al, 2010). But there is still some inconsistency in the research findings, several explanations have been given for this lack of consistency. Firstly, there are several "theoretical" hurdles, such as the notion of a "black box" relationship (Gonzalez-Benito et al, 2012).

A prominent used term is, the "black box relationship", this uses the premise that consensus has a direct linear impact on performance, but it does not provide an explanation for how this process works and this results in research inconsistencies. Secondly, the lack of a consistent

and balanced definition of consensus and the use of different methodologies can lead to inconsistent results (Kellermans et al, 2005; Markoczy, 2001; Ates et al, 2018). The concept of consensus can be interpreted in a range of different ways, from a single, all-encompassing construct to a construct that is composed of several "packs", these are bundles of meanings about consensus. Seeing consensus as a homogenous construct lead in the past to many inconsistent research results (West & Schwenk, 1996). This comes back to the argument made above that there can be multiple conceptualizations of a construct at the same time. For example, there are "packs" of consensus about means or "packs" of consensus about objectives. This wide spectrum of potential meanings leads to problems in using the concept because it is not clear which aspects are included or excluded. In their methodology, Kellermans and colleagues found that at least four different methodologies are currently used to measure consensus (Kellermans et al, 2005). This highlights that while there is no unified method for measuring consensus, it will always be difficult to measure consensus and its outputs. In addition to these theoretical and methodological hurdles, the issue of group thinking can lead to inconclusive results. Research designs might not pay attention to the role of group thinking in the group consensus-building process. Groups with a heavy focus on group thinking do not allow for a comprehensive group debate based on different points of view. In these cases, the advantages—and therefore the positive effect on performance—of consensus-building are not evident (Kellermans et al, 2011; Solomon, 2006). Research design must therefore gauge if their samples have a high level of group thinking; not acting on samples that demonstrate a high level of group thinking will have unintended effects on the research results.

The proposed argument is that is distilled from the literature is: if group members have a positive consensus on their objective and the means of how to reach it, the group will perform better (Mach & Baruch, 2015). The reasoning behind this is that consensus allows for better information dispersion, which help on clarifying the group goals and work coordination. The consensus also allows for better and buy-in and possible individual performance because of the fact that each team-member had valued input and participation in the decision-making process (Han, Chiang & Chang, 2010). The act of seeking to reach consensus also demonstrates interest on the part of employees and creates positive workplace experiences, which in turn increases employees' commitment to the organization (Chiaburu et al, 2013; Hochwarter et al, 2003). To

address the above-mentioned problems related to inconclusive results, consensus should be "split" into several "packs" (as reflected in the proposition). These packs are consensus on means and consensus on objectives. This "unpacking" of the concept of consensus should lead to more conclusive and replicable research results (Bourgeois, 1980; Gonzalez-Benito et al, 2012).

The above discussion leads to the following proposition:

P2: *If there is a high level of strategic consensus on meaning and especially on objectives in a team, the team members will be more set towards higher performance, and this will lead to better team performance.*

POLITICAL BEHAVIOR AND CONSENSUS-BUILDING MODERATED BY CHANGE

The last relationship examined in this article is a variant of political behaviour-consensus relationship and focuses on the political behavior and strategic consensus, moderated by change in a department. This relationship has a longstanding research history, it is important in many environments. Burns already showcased already in the early 1960s that change and political behaviour go hand in hand (1961), this was expanded by research of Crozier and Friedberg (1977, 1981), Burnes (2004) or more recently, concerning resistance, by Courpasson et al. (2012). Change is becoming more central, and it is happening at an increasing pace at both a macro- and micro-level (Marković, 2008; Martins, 2019) due to technological evolution, new economic realities, and climate change (Millar et al, 2012; Valenduc & Vendramin, 2017). This elevated level of change is thus also relevant to the topic of political behavior as explored in this article. Politics within a changing environment is also a strange contradiction: though everybody hopes that the motive behind the change is rational and sound, many suspect "political" motivations. The current level of research into political behavior and change is limited.

Change is also a concept which has many meanings and is hard to define on many accounts. This is linked to the rate of change, how the change happens, who it is affecting, how is it structured etc... (Todnem, 2005). For this article the framework conceptualized by Mintzberg & Westly (1992) is used. This framework looks at change in state (culture, structure) and change in strategy (vision, positions). For this article the proposed argument sees the change element in the light of change in state.

The argument that is brings change into the political behaviour-change relationship is based on several arguments. Firstly, Lewis argues that, in times of change, people want to use political tactics to improve their position and convince others to join them (Lewis, 2002). She argues that, in some cases, these political actions and strategies might be the only way to truly move organizations beyond the status quo. Other research suggests that structural change leads to an environment that exhibits competing perspectives and interests, so this reflects a real political arena where political behavior can have a calming effect on the actual behaviour (Frost & Egri, 1991). This builds further on the idea that change destabilizes the established power structures and enables other perspectives to become more prominent (McGuire & Hutchings, 2006; Seel, 2000). In an environment with a low level of change, the power structures are not debated in such a way that enables this opportunity to "challenge" the status quo. Secondly, research on managers in organizations undergoing change demonstrated the importance of information management (Armistead & Meakins, 2007; Van Dam et al, 2008). In times of change, information must be transferred and shared, but this information can also be used as a tool to enable political behavior (Burnett & Jaeger, 2011; Mutshewa, 2007). Here again, change creates the conditions for political behavior to have a wider and more powerful sphere of influence.

P3a: *The lower the level of change in the department in which a team operates, the lower the impact of political behavior on strategic consensus*.

P3b: *The higher the level of change in the department in which a team operates, the higher the impact of political behavior on strategic consensus*.
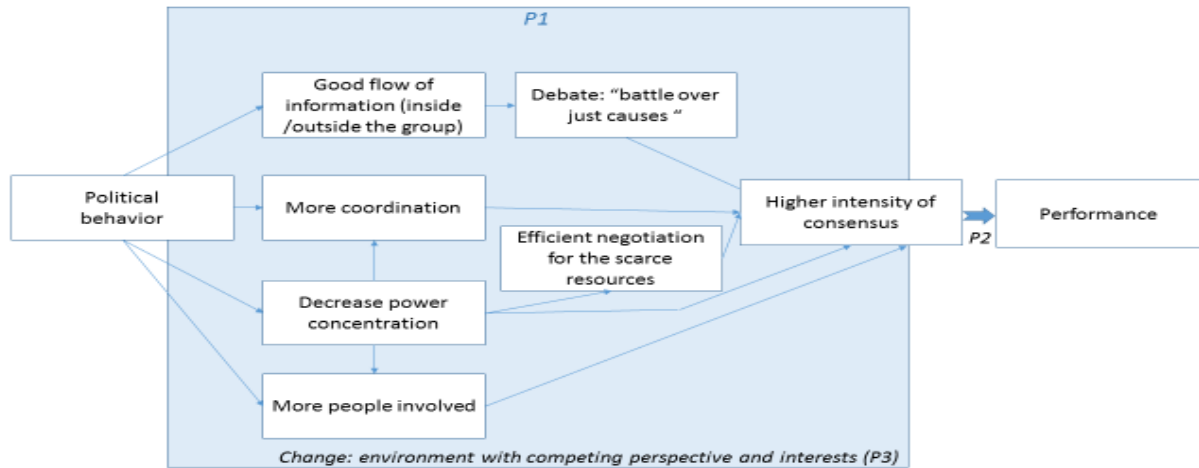
DISCUSSION

Figure 3: Detailed model

Although the majority of the research describes political behavior as harmful, the above model and propositions clearly shows that the positive politics propositions are grounded in already rich research debates (Eldor, 2017; Gotsis & Kortezi, 2011; Hochwarter, 2012). This theoretical approach works further on this and proposes a positive politics model. The proposed model seeks to further develop the positive politics literature and also seeks to answer the demands from the research field, namely, to come to integrative models on the effects of positive politics (Elbanna et al 2017). Based on this model, political behavior positively influences the consensus-building process. Furthermore, due to new insights and theoretical developments in the literature on consensus, the model argues that a higher strategic consensus, especially on objectives will lead to higher respective performances (Gonzalez-Benito et al, 2012). This can also be seen through the lens of degree of consensus. For consensus to have the most significant impact, it is important to have a positive consensus. Having only a negative consensus on the topic, could come with negative effects such as lower commitment, lower input, disengagement... In the ideal case, consensus is the cultural norm in the team and is the default option for the decision-making process (Wilkof, 1989). The inclusion of the moderator of change in the model also gives it a new angle. This angle introduces a new factor, namely

"change", which can affect both the political behavior and the consensus-building process itself. In addition, it reflects a new corporate reality, one that is going to present itself more and more and so will become a central factor in future decision-making research (Todnem, 2005). By combining the constructs into one clear set-up in which political behavior can have a genuine, positive influence on the consensus-building process, the model and the relationships described, the model contributes to the already established research avenues.

By focusing on these relationships, our research has made the following contributions. First, it has advanced research on political behavior and consensus-building. Past literature has been largely focused on the negative effects of political behavior and has considered the whole process a "black box" (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988; Gonzalez-Benito et al, 2012). This model, however, aims to describe what is happening in the black box and does not automatically see political behaviour as the "evil on earth". More specifically, the model focuses on the effects on the consensus process, which has not been researched and has been highlighted by several authors as an area in need of inquiry (Elbanna et al, 2017).

Secondly, our research aims to set further steps in the relationship consensus–performance. For a long time, the scientific literature has characterized this relationship as a stalemate between positive and negative outcomes (Kellermans et al, 2011; Priem, 1990). This model takes into account the theoretical advancements in the last two decades in this area and clears the way for testing the proposed theoretical developments in an empirical setting.

Thirdly, the inclusion of the parameter of change sheds new light on change and consensus and politics. As described, change is becoming a constant in many team setups. Teams have to become lean and adapt to digital evolutions. This highly impacts on how people work and interact with each other. Change and decision-making is already a heavily researched topic (Diefenbach, 2007). Consensus is a part of that decision-making process it is impacted by these changes. That is why this article puts this construct central and wants to better understand what it is influencing it and how does this construct influences performance.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This integrative model is just the start of further research into the possible positive effects of organizational politics. Further research is needed to broaden the validity of this research stream. An immediate next step could be an empirical test of the propositions made in this article. Because of the inconclusive nature of the literature as described above, the research should focus on settings and samples that are easy to replicate. This would not only support theoretical developments in positive politics but improve the coherence of the decision-making literature. An empirical study should also try to determine whether there is a threshold for organizational politics. A threshold value could be a game-changer in organizational politics research because it would allow researchers to more directly quantify positive and negative politics. This would give the current research debate a whole new direction and momentum.

The measure of political behavior is another possible focus of future research. Since the 1990s, "actual" political behavior has been seen as distinct from the "perception" of the political behavior (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Nye & Witt, 1993). This categorization could be used in the consensus-building process to determine if perceptions play a more significant role than the "actual" political reality. In other words, it could help identify whether people in the consensus-building process let them faster act lead by perceptions than lead by actual deeds of colleagues.

Finally, a valuable area of future focus could be to investigate the direct effect of change on political behavior. As described above, our current society and corporate environment is under great pressure to change and adapt to new situations. Do new technologies, such as machine learning and AI, and new management realities (new skillsets, labor uncertainty…) therefore have an influence on organizational politics itself? And how does this affect positive politics?

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