The Relationship between Political Behavior and Team Effectiveness in Management Teams:

*The Mediating Role of Team Cohesion*

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL BEHAVIOR, TEAM COHESION AND TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Abstract

Research on political behavior in organizations has grown considerably the last decades. However, there is a missing link in the literature regarding political behavior in management teams and how it affects team effectiveness. The purpose of this study has been to examine the effect of political behavior in management teams on task performance and team member satisfaction through its effect on team cohesion. 155 management teams from Norway and Denmark in the private and public sector were studied. Results from regression analysis showed that political behavior was negatively associated with task performance ($\beta = -.61, p < .01$), and team member satisfaction ($\beta = -.60, p < .01$). In line with earlier findings, team cohesion was found to be positively associated with task performance ($\beta = .78, p < .01$) and team member satisfaction ($\beta = .80, p < .01$). Results from mediation-analysis in PROCESS indicate that political behavior and its negative relationship with team effectiveness must be considered in light of diminished team cohesion. Significant mediation effects indicate that political behavior is indirectly negative to task performance ($b = -.35, CI_{95\%} = -.46$ to $.25$), and team member satisfaction ($b = -.45, CI_{95\%} = -.60$ to $.30$). The substantial mediation effects suggest that political behavior harms team effectiveness by reducing team cohesion. Theoretical and practical implications are provided for management teams about how they can become more effective by reducing political behavior and maintaining team cohesion.
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Introduction

Management teams (MT) are responsible for decision making in complex situations, which may result in severe consequences for the entire organization (Edmondson, Roberto, & Watkins, 2003). Members of a MT often interact on a regular basis and need to function effectively during different team processes to produce satisfying results and achieve goals (Bang & Midelfart, 2012). Since a MT’s ability to create high quality team results seems to be heavily weighted on interpersonal processes to lay a foundation for important and effective team processes (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001), factors that may disturb functional interpersonal processes inside the team are crucial to address.

MTs can prevent the organization from functioning effectively by having internal power struggles, intrigues and personal positioning (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). Organizations in general, and MTs especially, are described as arenas for games and power play – also known in the literature as organizational politics (Bang & Midelfart, 2012). Organizational politics are commonly termed as “activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one’s preferred outcomes” (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 7). Political behavior in management teams are “the observable, but often covert, actions by which executives enhance their power to influence decisions” (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988, p. 738).

The research field of organizational politics is characterized by a lack of agreement in what should be included in the term, and the constructs “organizational politics”, “political behavior” and “politics” are used interchangeably. This leads to inconsistent results when assessing the scope, content, factors that affect and consequences of politics in organizations (Buchanan, 2008). While theory and research on organizational politics has expanded rapidly in recent decades, there is relatively little knowledge about organizational politics in and around teams, including management teams. Few studies specifically and explicitly deal with organizational politics within teams or workgroups. Although there is little doubt that internal politics is a common phenomenon in every organization, too little is known about the exact nature and boundaries of such politics among teams of various structures, nature, cultures and orientations.

The few studies regarding organizational politics in MTs have been with a qualitative approach and relatively small in sample size. The results have been inconclusive and certain knowledge about how politics affect effectiveness in management teams is yet not established. Managers who have power to make crucial decisions on behalf of the organization play a major part in the organizations effectiveness. Given this pivotal role in
ORGANIZATIONS there is a need for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and how it affects MTs’ effectiveness.

Much of the research done on organizational politics show that politics leads to low performance on various dimensions, from attitudes such as satisfaction and commitment, to self-reports of lower performance (Hochwarter, 2003; Miller, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008). In the same vein, elevated levels of stress, negligent behaviors, and aggression tend to be found as consequences of organizational politics (e.g., Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997; Vigoda, 2000). When taking this perspective and elevating it to the team level, it is likely that teams perceived as highly political will be perceived as such due to rivalry political behaviors within the team.

Activities of political character that is essentially self-promoting and intended to influence team members’ decisions and behaviors may inhibit positive group processes. Team cohesion may be such a process political behavior can have a negative effect on. Teams that are cohesive might have a better ability to perform effectively by generating a constructive climate, which in turn can foster positive affections and collaborative team behavior that leads to successful functioning and performance. In contrast to organizational politics, team cohesion has almost solely been related to positive outcomes, and cohesive groups have been found to exhibit persistence despite obstacles, which eventually leads to better performance (see the meta-analyses of Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Evans & Dion, 1991; Gully, Devine, & Whitney, 1995; Mullen & Copper, 1994).

Political behavior might create an unfortunate team dynamic by alienating team members and forming alliances. If political behavior within MTs inhibit positive team processes to emerge, such as cohesion, it will be reasonable to assume that this will harm the effectiveness of the team. To study MTs as arenas for organizational politics is relevant for several reasons. Organizational politics is more or less a reality in many MTs, and can have negative consequences for the effectiveness, and in the end the organizations performance. Moreover, it calls for an understanding for the phenomenon and why it can be negative for MT effectiveness. The reason may lay in the fact that it decreases cohesion within the team.

A relationship between organizational politics, cohesion and performance in teams was been proposed in Howes, Citera, and Cropanzano’s (1995) team-based model. However, no empirical studies have yet examined this relationship.

The aim of this paper is to investigate to which extent and how political behavior within management teams can affect team effectiveness, and if team cohesion mediates the relationship between political behavior and team effectiveness.
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Effective management teams

A management team usually consists of a superior leader and those leaders that directly report to him or her (Bang & Midelfart, 2012). To be an effective management team, the team must reach its goals, enhance team member’s ability to cooperate interdependently in the future and create development and motivation for its members (Wageman, Nunes, Burruss, & Hackman, 2008). Further, there is a wide range of challenges inside the MT that needs to be encountered in order to have satisfied team members, as well as function and deliver results effectively alongside with high quality. Challenges like diversity (Jehn, Chadwick, & Thatcher, 1997), social integration and communication (Smith et al., 1994), differing interests, goals, as well as other individual characteristics, such as personality (Wall & Callister, 1995), might be sources of pressure that can affect team outcomes.

Team outcomes has been measured and operationalized through different performance typologies such as group performance (Hackman & Katz, 2010; Mullen & Copper, 1994), team performance (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004; Thompson et al., 2015) proximal and distal team outcomes (de Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012), decision making (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988) and team effectiveness (Edmondson et al., 2003; Tekleab, Quigley, & Tesluk, 2009). Hackman and Katz (2010) propose that effective teams should be evaluated through a multidimensional framework of team effectiveness since a singular focus on task outcomes might have a detrimental effect concerning team function and performance over time. By having a wider team outcome measure, it can give more knowledge of management teams. In regards to this study, effective MTs will be measured on the criterion variables task performance (TP) and team member satisfaction (TMS).

Task Performance

Task performance can be understood as management teams’ own perception of its successfulness and the added value the MT contribute to the organization. To assess the quality on their own performance, MTs must identify the main results the team produces. Management teams can produce results that give an added value to the organization both directly or indirectly. Development of overarching goals and strategies, or quality control and follow up on plans produces results directly. Whereas, giving advice and input to other team members so they have a better foundation to make a good decision in their unit is producing results indirectly. In addition to MTs perception of added value to the organization, getting positive feedback on their performance can also characterize a highly performing MT. Finally, the decisions MTs make must be perceived as high in quality and beneficial for the
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organization in order to contribute positively to MT effectiveness. Task performance in this study is operationalized as a distal outcome that includes high quality decisions made by the team, in addition to general task performance.

Team Member Satisfaction

Team member satisfaction (TMS) is included as the second outcome variable of interest as a supplement to task performance. To function as an effective team, team members must perceive that they are developing their professional competencies and learning as a result of being a member of the MT. Further, team members who enjoy working in the MT and get a lot of energy from meetings can contribute to effectiveness. Team member growth and well-being can be understood as individually experienced motivation and stimulation inside the team. Wageman et al. (2008) suggest that these factors should be included to have a comprehensive measurement of team effectiveness. In their model of conditions for team effectiveness they highlight individual team members’ learning and team capability as an additive measure of team effectiveness together with task performance.

A team may deliver satisfying results in line with the performance criterion, but not necessarily on the personal well-being criterion. Hackman and Katz (2010) elaborate on how group processes and experiences might foster good performance, but can be on the expense of team members’ well-being. Hence, an effective team will be better measured by different effectiveness criteria, including both a performance level and a satisfaction measurement (Wageman et al., 2008). In light of this description, a management team will be characterized as effective if it is able to achieve satisfying levels of task performance and at the same time experience high level of team member satisfaction and learning. Thus, team member satisfaction will function as a measure of proximal outcome in addition to the distal outcome variable task performance.

Political behavior in management teams and team outcomes: Direct effect

Research in organizational politics has strong roots in theory and research on social influence and has been developed and advanced largely through contributions of different scholars and others over the past half-century (for reviews, see Ferris, Hochwarter, et al., 2002; Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003). In one of the first scholarly discussions of organizational politics, Burns (1961) argued that corporations are made up of social systems in which members compete, often vigorously, for rewards and advancement. Accordingly, Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) maintained that “organizations will tend to be influenced by
those who control the resources they require” (p. 44). Based largely on Gandz and Murray’s (1980) results confirming that the existence of workplace politics is common to most organizations, research attained heightened scholarly and applied legitimacy during the late 1970s and early 1980s (e.g. Porter, Allen, & Angle, 1981). Efforts to explain behavioral tactics, in the form of classification taxonomies (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1979; Mintzberg, 1985), promoted more refined treatments of the organizational politics construct. Finally, it was now firmly established that organizations are indeed political arenas, often reflecting conflict for resources that is both ubiquitous and energy depleting (Mintzberg, 1985). These contributions increased the research base of organizational politics considerably the next 30 years. Systematic approaches that both evaluated and extended previous research were considered necessary after the construct gained an identity in the organizational sciences.

**Definition of political behavior**

In its broadest sense, the area of organizational politics includes theory and research on power, influence, and politics, and the style of delivery and execution of influence. This study will focus on the construct of political behavior within the field of organizational politics. Given the substantial interest in political behavior, both within the organizational sciences and across disciplines, it is not surprising that numerous definitions pervade the literature (Buchanan, 2008). However, some commonalities can be identified. For example, a number of studies have acknowledged that political behavior is essentially self-serving (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Porter et al., 1981). Others have classified political behavior as unauthorized activity undertaken to secure outcomes not attainable via organizationally sanctioned means (Mayes & Allen, 1977) or a power struggle over workplace assets in settings typically considered bureaucratic (Vigoda-Gadot, 2003). Some research endorsing a less negative view of political behavior is represented in the literature as well. Pfeffer (1981) described politics as a social activity that can contribute to the organization’s goals and objectives. Vigoda-Gadot (2003) maintained that political behavior is “a socially acceptable phenomenon” (p. 10), whereas others have documented a relationship between the use of political activity and managerial success (Luthans, Rosenkrantz, & Harry, 1985). Some scholars have adopted a middle-of-the-road perspective. For example, politics has been described as a “two-edged sword” (Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1980, p. 93). Buchanan’s (2008) review identified both functional and dysfunctional antecedents, behaviors, and consequences of political behavior. Finally, a growing number of scholars
regard politics in neutral terms (Buchanan, Claydon, & Doyle, 1999), as a component of the social environment (Fedor, Maslyn, Farmer, & Bettenhausen, 2008; Pfeffer, 1981) which is neither inherently positive nor inherently negative.

In spite of the inability to consistently define political behaviors in organizations, this study intends to have a focus on political behavior as essentially self-serving, as it has been positioned by traditional definitions. More explicitly, in this study I define political behavior as informal (i.e., not sanctioned by the employer), strategic activities aimed at protecting or promoting self-interest by influencing the thinking, perceptions, or behavior of the other members of the organization (Allen et al., 1979; Farrell & Petersen, 1982; Hochwarter, 2003; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Pettigrew, 2014; Porter et al., 1981). Political behavior is considered as the opposite of making use of direct influence techniques, like open discussion when information is shared in arenas that are available for all relevant actors in the decision making process (Bourgeois III & Eisenhardt, 1988).

**Political behavior in management teams**

Theory and research on political behavior has increased in recent decades. However, there is relatively little knowledge about politics in and around teams, including management teams. Even though it might be taboo among leaders to talk about having and using their power, it has been established through a number of studies that politics, alliances, hidden agendas and power struggles among leaders do exist. As Ferris and Hochwarter (2011) notes in their review about political behavior in organizations: “Those failing to acknowledge this certainty presumably operate with a “head in the sand” mentality, which diminishes one’s sensitivity to unwanted or destructive political conduct” (p. 450). Pfeffer (1992) argued in addition that political behavior is more profound in top management teams (TMT) in comparison with other teams. Since their role is at times crucial for survival and success, it is more likely that internal politics of decision-making directed towards other team members will be higher in TMTs compared with ordinary teams.

It may not be unexpected that political behavior is more common among managers compared to other individuals in the organizations as set forth by two conceptual models that articulate antecedents of political behavior. Porter et al. (1981) suggested that the decision to engage in political behavior, at least partially, was driven by individuals’ need for power, Machiavellianism, locus of control, risk-seeking propensity, and lack of personal power. Similarly, Ferris, Fedor, and King (1994) argued that much of managerial effectiveness is determined by the ability to effectively navigate the political context of the organization.
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Although there is little doubt that internal politics is a common phenomenon in every organization, too little is known about the exact nature and boundaries of such politics among teams of various structures. Nevertheless, when searching for research on politics in MTs especially there are relative few publications and even fewer empirical studies conducted.

In this study, political behavior in management teams is defined in line with Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) as “the observable, but often covert, actions by which executives enhance their power to influence decisions” (p. 738). These actions are usually intended to either promote or protect self-interest for individuals or groups (Allen et al., 1979). Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) conducted a qualitative study examining the impact of politics in eight TMTs. Four typical examples of politics among top managers were observed in their study:

• Unofficial alliances and coalitions between some of the members.
• Hidden lobbying and attempt to influence central decision makers.
• Filtering and withholding information.
• Filtering of what should be discussed in meetings and which decisions that was made outside of the group.

Even though variations were found regarding how much politics characterized interaction, there was a clear pattern among the eight TMTs. When power was centralized around the top manager there was a greater degree of politics compared to TMTs where power was decentralized and distributed between members (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). Thus, there is reason to believe that MTs varies when it comes to how much they are characterized by alliances, power battles, hidden agendas and withholding information.

Consequences of organizational politics and political behavior

When organizational politics is defined as a phenomenon that subsumes all forms of influence in organizations, it can take on both negative and positive connotations. It is not uncommon for employees to view “office politics” as a phenomenon having only negative organizational and interpersonal consequences (Gandz & Murray, 1980). Though, political behavior is often described as an important component of influence processes in organizations (Mayes & Allen, 1977) and research indicate potential interpersonal and organizational benefits to engaging in such activity. For example, Buchanan (2008) found some functional consequences of political behavior amongst managers, like succeeding as a
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change agent, contribution to organizational effectiveness and winning competition for resources.

However, in line with political behavior being actions to protect or promote self-interests, it is commonly associated with a variety of negative actions that are harmful and dangerous from the organizational point of view (e.g., Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris & King, 1991; Mintzberg, 1983; Parker, Dipboye, & Jackson, 1995; Vigoda, 2000, 2001, 2002). Several meta-analysis and research conducted on organizational politics and outcomes suggests that highly political organizational environments are responsible for a variety of harmful work consequences. This includes higher strain and job stress, higher turnover intentions, and lower job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, perceived innovation and task performance (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Miller et al., 2008; Parker et al., 1995). Consequently, occurrence of organizational politics, whether actual or perceived, will have adverse effects on organizational productivity and profitability (Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002; 1989; Kacmar & Baron, 1999).

Research on political behavior in teams, including MTs and team effectiveness is nonetheless limited. The few empirical studies conducted of politics in MTs indicate certainly that political behaviors mostly have negative outcomes, both for the MT and for the organizations performance (Bourgeois III & Eisenhardt, 1988; Dean & Sharfman, 1996; Nutt, 1993; Voyer, 1994). Indeed, Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) found in their study of eight top management teams a clear negative relationship between the degree of politics in the TMT and the organizations results (measured in sales volume, sales growth and profit margin). TMTs of effective firms avoided negative political behavior, whereas the TMTs of poor-performing firms tended to use negative political behaviors. Dean and Sharfman (1996) found the same pattern in their study of 52 decisions in 24 different firms: the more MTs was characterized by politics, the less the chance for that the decisions made resulted in goals managers had set out for the case.

Political behavior among managers may be evident in an attempt to acquire their fair share of available rewards, where, due to uncertainty, the environment does not provide normative guidelines for appropriate behavior. Such self-interest behavior can harm team effectiveness because such people might not have the team goals as their priority. Moreover, the other team members might shift focus from the behaviors needed for achieving team goals toward the political behaviors apparent in the team. Similarly, when others believe an individual is acting in a self-interested or negatively political manner, they may feel the need
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to engage in their own defensive tactics (Mayes & Allen, 1977) which can hinder effectiveness.

Literature on political behavior on an individual level shows different outcomes. However, studies of political behavior in MTs show subsequently negative consequences. Hence, although it appears that MTs are more profoundly characterized by political behavior, these actions seem to harm performance and lower team member satisfaction in various ways. All in all, it is therefore reasonable to assume the following:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): Political behavior in management teams is negatively related to task performance.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): Political behavior in management teams is negatively related to team member satisfaction.

Team cohesion: construct and outcomes

Teams are not merely sets of aggregated, independent individuals; they are unified social entities (Forsyth, 2005). Whenever a team comes into existence, it becomes a system with emergent properties that has to be understood as more than the sum of individual members. Marks et al. (2001) defined emergent states as “construct that characterize properties of the team that are typically dynamic in nature and vary as a function of team context, inputs, processes, and outcomes” (p. 357). Examples of emergent states include variables such as collective efficacy, potency, cohesion, and situational awareness (Marks et al., 2001). Emergent states can be considered both as team inputs and proximal outcomes. As a proximal outcome, different team-level processes such as the political behaviors of team members may affect emergent states, like team cohesion.

The classical definition of cohesion or cohesiveness was provided by Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) as “the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group” (p. 164). This definition provided direction for scores of studies that followed. However, the operational difficulties that accompanied such an ambitious definition became apparent - not the least of which was how to measure a “total force field”. This ambiguity led some to question the adequacy of the concept itself (Albert, 1953). There is now a general agreement in the literature that group cohesion is composed of more than one dimension and a three-factor conceptualization of cohesion dates back to one of the earliest mentions of the concept by Festinger et al. (1950). The three factors are interpersonal attraction, task commitment and group pride. In previous meta-analysis of cohesiveness, both Mullen and
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Copper (1994) and Beal et al. (2003) adopted this tripartite conceptualization of the components of cohesiveness.

Beal et al. (2003, p. 995) defined *interpersonal attraction* as “a shared liking for or attachment to the members of the group”; *task commitment* as “the extent to which a shared commitment to the group’s task exists”; and *group pride* as “the extent to which group members exhibit liking for the status or the ideologies that the group supports or represents, or the shared importance of being a member of the group”. More specifically, team cohesion is often said to represent the degree of member integration or “bonding” in which members share a strong commitment to one another and/or to the purpose of the team (Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001).

Within management teams, cohesiveness can be thought to be especially important because of the complex and ambiguous nature of the team’s task. Research has shown that teams that perform well under uncertain and ambiguous conditions are highly coordinated and flexible (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). As Smith et al. (1994) explain, “top management teams that work well together react faster, are more flexible, use superior problem solving techniques, and are more productive and efficient than less integrative teams” (p. 432). The sort of integration that is necessary for this flexibility and efficiency is more likely to be a function of affective, interpersonal relationships than of formal, role-defined relationships (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Team cohesion has been one of the most thoroughly investigated features of teams over the past 75 years (see Friedkin, 2004, for reviews), with literally thousands of studies completed and several meta-analyses published in the existing literature. Cohesion is also found to be one of the most relevant mediators affecting team performance (González, Burke, Santuzzi, & Bradley, 2003; Greer, 2012; Zaccaro, 1991). A positive relationship between cohesion and team performance has been shown in several meta-analytic reviews conducted over the past 25 years (Beal et al., 2003; Evans & Dion, 1991; Gully et al., 1995; Mullen & Copper, 1994). In the most recent meta-analysis, Beal et al. (2003) showed that group cohesion was more strongly related to performance behavior (i.e., what team members do) with a mean corrected correlation of ($M_p = .301$), than to other performance outcomes ($M_p = .168$). Also, group cohesion was more strongly related to efficiency ($M_p = .310$) than to effectiveness ($M_p = .175$). In addition, all of the cohesion components were significantly related to team performance at the team level of analysis, with task commitment exhibiting the strongest relation. The ascending order of effect sizes was interpersonal attraction ($M_p = .199$), group pride ($M_p = .261$), and task commitment ($M_p = .278$).
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The outcome of team cohesiveness has also been claimed to be divided into two categories – morale and performance (Daft, 2014). As a general rule, morale is higher in cohesive teams because of increased communication among members, a friendly team climate, maintenance of membership because of commitment to the team, loyalty, and member participation in team decisions and activities. High cohesiveness has almost uniformly good effects on the satisfaction and morale of team members (Tekleab et al., 2009). With respect to performance, studies suggest that teams in which members share strong feelings of connectedness and generally positive interactions tend to perform better (Gupta, Huang, & Niranjan, 2010).

Accordingly, a friendly, positive team environment is expected to contribute to productivity and higher task performance as well as member satisfaction, and therefore the following is proposed:

**Hypothesis 2a (H2a):** Team cohesion in management teams is positively related to task performance.

**Hypothesis 2b (H2b):** Team cohesion in management teams is positively related to team member satisfaction.

Team cohesion as a mediator between political behavior and team effectiveness in management teams

The development on team cohesion seems to depend a lot on team processes, or behaviors, such as communication, information-sharing and coordination (e.g., Temkin-Greener, Gross, Kunitz, & Mukamel, 2004). If political behavior characterizes the working environment, it can decrease these factors alongside cohesion and negative effects from this occurrence will most likely harm team effectiveness. Several propositions from earlier research can be drawn to imply decreased team cohesion following political behavior.

**Social relationships.** Work environments characterized by political behavior might be thought to start up some mechanisms affecting individual team members and also change the climate within the team. Political behavior has been found to inhibit the development of effective social relationships (Witt, Kacmar, Carlson, & Zivnuska, 2002). In contexts that are perceived as highly political, people are unlikely to want to go out of their way to help others, as any energy that they dedicate to others may be perceived as taking away from their efforts to promote self-interests. This can make it difficult to acquire an interpersonal attraction for one and another, which is considered to be a vital component of group cohesion. Lencioni
(2002) described the ultimate dysfunction as occurring when team members put their individual needs above the collective goal of the team. This tends to shift focus from the relevant team results and impedes the desire to win. Furthermore, it has been suggested that political behavior may take the form of bullying in settings perceived as unfair (Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley, & Harvey, 2007), which have negative consequences. Perceived political behavior seems to positively correlate with antagonistic work behavior such as arguing with co-workers or gossiping (Cheng, 1983; Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1994), or even violent behavior causing distress among colleagues (Vigoda, 2002). Employees perceiving the work environment as political will also report greater levels of anxiety and tension, and lower levels of general health (Cropanzano et al., 1997). Political behavior may appear to reflect descriptions of relationship conflict in terms of friction, personality clashes, or threat between members.

**Shifting alliances.** When team members use power in an attempt to divide the team and form coalitions within the team, competing for acknowledgement of their ideas over those of others, it is unlikely for the team to be viable. Political behavior has often been described as organized into temporary and shifting alliances (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988), consequentially harming the team as a whole unit. Eisenhardt and Bourgeois’ (1988) study showed that the TMTs failed to develop natural, issue-based alliances when they were characterized by political behavior. In addition, their study demonstrated that MTs with little degree of politics had top leaders that were experienced as easy to cooperative with, human oriented, pragmatic, team player and consensus oriented. They explain the results by saying that politics takes time and attention away from the managers’ responsibilities. Politics were also found to be information restricting, which created communication barriers making the MTs more rigid and less flexible.

**Organizational support.** Complex and unsettled working environments are often characterized by lack of organizational support and resources. Such environments have been found to attract more political activity than environments that are not so political characterized and favoritism often develops (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Poon, 2004; Vigoda, 2002). How employees view the support for and importance of teamwork in the organization has been found to moderate the relationship between their perception of politics and expressions of job satisfaction (Valle & Witt, 2001). Woodman and Sherwood (1980) found that an emphasis on teamwork, which builds trust and cooperation, provides organizational members with information about their fellow workers. When employees have knowledge of coworker contributions, higher levels of trust are likely among coworkers (Banker, Field,
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Schroeder, & Sinha, 1996), which may contribute to the cohesiveness of the team. Valle and Witt’s (2001) findings revealed that among workers reporting moderate to high levels of organizational politics, those reporting high levels of teamwork importance were more satisfied than were those reporting low levels of teamwork importance. Consequently, an emphasis on the importance of teamwork, including efforts to support teamwork behaviors that will benefit cohesion, may increase the levels of job satisfaction among some employees (Valle & Witt, 2001).

Commitment, withdrawal and stress. Other factors related to political behaviors are also likely to decrease the level of team cohesion. Organizational politics has among others been shown to negatively influence affective commitment (Chang et al., 2009), be a source of withdrawal behavior (Cropanzano et al., 1997) and stress (e.g. Ferris, Frink, Gilmore, & Kacmar, 1994) among workers. For example, low organizational commitment and displaying of withdrawal behavior can make it difficult to interact with processes resulting in cohesiveness. It may result in lower task commitment, and make it challenging to tie bonds with other team members, or take pride in what the team does and accomplishes. Empirical research have indicated that organizational politics have direct, moderated, and mediated effects on stress-related outcomes (Perrewé, Rosen, & Maslach, 2012). Driskell, Driskell, and Salas (2015) suggested that stress can result in a loss of team perspective and a shift to a more narrow or individualistic self-focus which will impair social behavior. This is thought to primary affect the “shared bond” component of cohesiveness. In addition, research has documented a significant relationship between perceived stress and negative emotional state and it is likely that the primary effect of increased negative emotion will be on the interpersonal integration component of cohesiveness (Driskell et al., 2015). That is, increased negative emotion may result in team members who are moody, angry, sullen, emotionally unstable, and high-strung.

Mediation model

Consequently, earlier research indicates that political behavior alone does not necessarily decrease team effectiveness. However, it might give rise to some mechanisms in the team that affects other important factors that may be the reason for performance suffering and individuals being less satisfied. When viewing politics as a destructive phenomenon, I suggest that higher levels of political behavior within the team can influence some individual and team factors negatively. Examples are increased frustration among some team members,
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higher levels of stress and cynicism, lower levels of team cohesion and eventually poorer levels of team effectiveness.

Consistent with theory, political behavior can have dysfunctional outcomes both at the individual and organizational level, and it makes sense to elevate these outcomes to concern a team level as well. Moreover, several meta-analyzes conducted on the relationship between team cohesion and performance show a positive association. Even though no such relationship has been shown empirically in the literature, earlier findings imply that there can be a negative relationship between political behavior and team cohesion.

To explain how political behavior affects team effectiveness, a mediation model is proposed, whereby political behavior is related to outcomes via the emergent state of team cohesion.

Figure 1. Theoretical model linking Political behavior and Team Effectiveness

- **Political Behavior** ➔ **Team Cohesion** ➔ **Team Effectiveness**

Taken together, and in accordance with earlier literature, I suggest that political behavior in MTs will have an adverse effect on MTs effectiveness by minimizing team cohesion. In light of this, hypothesis 3a- and b is formulated:

**Hypothesis 3a (H3a):** Team cohesion mediates the relationship between political behavior and task performance in management teams; that is, political behavior decreases team cohesion, which in their turn decreases task performance.

**Hypothesis 3b (H3b):** Team cohesion mediates the relationship between political behavior and team member satisfaction in management teams; that is, political behavior decreases team cohesion, which in their turn decreases team member satisfaction.
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Method

Self-report data from a sample of 155 management teams (80 Norwegian, 71 Danish and 4 teams from other countries) from public and private sector, comprising 1083 managers, was used to perform regression analysis using SSPS 22.0 and PROCESS 2.15.

Sample

The sample of 155 MTs included organizations from a broad range of sectors: health care, consultancy, economy and finance, facility and support, industry, entertainment, public administration, commercial service, transport, culture, energy and education. The respondents were recruited through consultation and development work in Norway and Denmark.

The size of the MTs varied from large teams with 23 leaders to small teams of 3 leaders with an average MT size of 7 members. The majority of MTs comprised 4 to 6 persons. The distribution of gender was almost equal across MTs with a total percentage of 54% males and 46% females. In the present sample, 20% were top management teams, 41% middle-level management teams and 39% lower-level management teams (level 3 or lower).

Procedure

The participants rated their respective management teams on several dimensions of effectiveness. There was no systematic procedure of recruitment of the sample. Approximately 40% of the MTs answered the survey as an introduction to a following development course. The other 60% was asked to participate and be part of a research project. All MTs received an email with a web link with invitation to answer the questionnaire with a deadline of one week. The MTs that had not responded within the deadline received an additional email with a reminder. All of the participants in the survey received a written report after completion, containing management team scores and feedback on the questionnaire results.

The mean response rate across management teams was 96.9%.

Measures

The scales used in this study come from a questionnaire called effect (Bang & Midelfart, 2015), developed by Henning Bang and Thomas Nesset Midelfart, based on the research described in their book “Effektive ledergrupper” (Bang & Midelfart, 2012) and in Bang’s doctoral dissertation (Bang, 2010). Each measure consists of 5-8 questions on a 7-point Likert scale, with the value of 7, indicating “totally agree”, 1 as “totally disagree”, and
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4 as “neither agree nor disagree”. This study examines the measures of political behavior (5 questions), team cohesion (6 questions), task performance (8 questions) and team member satisfaction (5 questions). Reliability of measures was estimated at individual levels by Cronbach's alpha.

A complete overview of the items for each dimension with Cronbach’s alpha values is presented in Appendix A.

Political behavior (PB) was operationalized as the degree of hidden agendas, alliances and power struggles within the team, and the degree of withholding of information and decisions made outside the team. The PB-scale was based on the study of political behavior in management teams by Bourgeois III and Eisenhardt (1988), and included items like: “Often matters which should have been addressed in the management team meeting are decided outside the meeting”, and “Certain team members deliberately withhold information that may be important for the management team”. PB was measured as a continuous variable with five items on a seven point Likert scale, with the value 7 indicating the highest level of political behavior within the team. Estimated reliability of PB was .80 (Cronbach's alpha).

Team cohesion (TC) was operationalized as the degree of team members exhibiting a liking for each other, group pride and a commitment to the task (Mullen & Copper, 1994). TC was measured as a continuous variable with six items on the same seven point Likert scale, and included items like: “The management team members seem to really like one another” and “The management team members rarely take an overall perspective on the matters we discuss” (reversed). A value of 7 on the TC scale indicates the highest level of cohesiveness. Estimated reliability of TC was .85 (Cronbach’s alpha).

Team member satisfaction (TMS) was operationalized as the degree to which individual team members experience learning, well-being and motivation within the MT (Wageman, Hackman, & Lehman, 2005, p. 376). The TMS-scale was based on theories and research on management teams performed by Hackman (2002) and Wageman and colleges (2008). TMS was measured as a continuous variable with five items on a seven point Likert scale, with the value 7 indicating the highest level of team member satisfaction in the MT. Two items included were: “Working in this management team contributes to my learning”, and “I really enjoy working together with my management team colleagues”. Estimated reliability of TMS was .87 (Cronbach's alpha).

Task performance (TP) was operationalized as the MTs ability to deliver high quality performance results, which contributes to both an increased added value to the organization and decision quality. TP was measured as a continuous variable with eight items on a seven
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point Likert scale with the value of 7 indicating the highest level of task performance in the MT. Two items included were: “Our management team is very successful in its efforts”, and “The vast majority of decisions made by the management team turn out to be beneficial for the organization”. Estimated reliability of TP was .89 (Cronbach's alpha).

Reliability is an estimate of “true score variance” - i.e. the amount of variance in an observed indicator that is explained by variance in a latent construct. A Cronbach's alpha value of .80 (PB) indicates that 80% of the variability in the scores represents the construct of interest, and 20% is considered as random measurement error. All scales had satisfying alpha values (ranging from .80 to .89), meeting commonly used criteria for acceptable reliability (Kline, 2000; Nunnally, 1978).

**Possible confounding variables.** In the analyses, two possible confounding variables were controlled for: management team size (MTS) and management team level (MTL). Team size itself might be a source of confrontations, large group effects and logistical issues (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Large teams might have greater likelihood of fostering negative group effect like social loafing or free rider effects (Cornes & Sandler, 1996; Karau & Williams, 1993). Such negative group effects can harm team performance and satisfaction. Large management teams may also face more challenges with creating an effectiveness climate with collective engagement than small management teams. In the present sample, there was substantial variability in management team size – MTS ranging from 3 to 23 team members, calling for the effect of team size to be controlled for. MTS was measured simply as the number of team members in each management team ($M=6.99$, $SD=3.33$).

Additionally, management team level (MTL) was used as a control variable. Some have suggested that higher-level management teams differ from lower level management teams in longer decision making processes (Floyd & Lane, 2000). Presumably, members of a top management team might be more motivated to make effective and good decisions in light of their pivotal role in the organization. For instance, Hambrick (1994) highlights how the role of top management teams is different to lower level management teams with regards to their higher-level responsibilities in context of accountability of the key-decision making processes. Hence, differences in responsibility and position through level of management can have an effect on team outcomes, which needs to be controlled for. MTL was measured as a quasi-continuous variable on a three point scale with items involving 1 as top management teams, value 2 as level 2 of management and value 3 as level 3 or lower of management team.
Aggregation

This study examines political behavior, cohesion and team effectiveness on team level. It is conceptually meaningful to view team effects on a group level when cohesion emerges as a product of members’ interaction (Marks et al., 2001) and when political behavior is reflected as influential activities and tactics like building coalitions and withholding information from others (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988). Additionally, team performance as a product of team members’ interactions, is conceptually meaningful to investigate on an aggregated level.

To appropriately aggregate data to investigate such effects on a group level, two conditions must be satisfied: There must be substantial variability in aggregated scores, and management team members must show substantial agreement in perceptions of team characteristics. To examine variability between teams and agreement among team members, Eta Squared and inter-rater agreement based measures such as \( r_{wg} \) were calculated and compared to threshold values. All of the \( r_{wg} \) values were in the range of .64-.73. James, Demaree, and Wolf (1984) recommend .70 as a cutoff for within-team interrater agreement, while other researchers (e.g., Guzzo, Yost, Campbell, & Shea, 1993) suggest that values of .50 and above can be used. All of the Eta-Squared values \( (\eta^2) \) were in the range of .33-.42, meaning for example that 42% of the variation in political behavior can be explained by differences between management teams. It is recommended to have \( \eta^2 \)-coefficients above .20 to argue for substantial variability in scores (Georgopoulos, 1986). Agreement among team members and variability between teams are shown in table 1, in addition to reliability for aggregated scores estimated by intraclass correlations \( (ICC(2)) \).

### Table 1.

*Inter-rater agreement, variability between teams and reliability of aggregated scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>( r_{wg} )</th>
<th>( \eta^2 )</th>
<th>ICC(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political behavior</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team cohesion</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task performance</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team member satisfaction</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Statistical analyses**

The assumptions of normality and linearity were examined for all measures, and
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Multivariate normality was examined by Mahalanobis distances. Mahalanobis distance is based on a chi-square distribution and provides indications of which cases may be multivariate outliers. Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) propose a critical value of Mahalanobis distance to be 13.82, when the analysis has two or more independent variables. All teams were found to be in the range of the critical value, with the maximum Mahalanobis distance of 9.84. The final sample comprised 155 management teams with no missing data. To examine the proposed hypotheses about direct effects, ordinary multiple regression analyses were performed in SPSS and examination of mediated effects were performed using PROCESS.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics with means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities and zero-order correlations among all study variables are provided in table 2. As presented in table 2, political behavior is negatively and significantly correlated with task performance (r = -.64, p < .01) and team member satisfaction (r = -.59, p < .01), which offer support to H1. Political behavior is also negatively correlated with team cohesion (r = -.71, p < .01). Team cohesion is positively and significantly correlated with both task performance (r = .80, p < .01) and team member satisfaction (r = .77, p < .01), which offers support to H2 and is consistent with prior findings (e.g., Beal et al., 2003).

Table 2.
Scale reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha), means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations (N=155).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Management team size</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.99</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Level of management</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Political behavior</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Team cohesion</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.71**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Task performance</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.64**</td>
<td>.80**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Team member satisfaction</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.59**</td>
<td>.77**</td>
<td>.75**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. **p < .01.
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Examination of direct effects through multiple regression analysis

To investigate H1a and H1b, and H2a and H2b, predicting a relationship between political behavior and team outcomes, and team cohesion and team outcomes, multiple regression analysis was conducted. The controlling variables, MTS and MTL were run in step 1, and the predictor variable was additionally included in step 2.

Table 3.
Regression analysis: Direct effect of Political behavior on team outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor: Political behavior</th>
<th>Task performance</th>
<th>Team member satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Step 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.621**</td>
<td>6.683**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management team size</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management team level</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political behavior</td>
<td>-.61**</td>
<td>-.60**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R^2</td>
<td>.075**</td>
<td>.414**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>7.267**</td>
<td>37.205**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR^2</td>
<td>.338**</td>
<td>.329**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All numbers in each columns are standardized β-coefficients, ** p < .01.

Table 4.
Regression analysis: Direct effect of Team cohesion on team outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor: Team cohesion</th>
<th>Task performance</th>
<th>Team member satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Step 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.621**</td>
<td>2.158**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management team size</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management team level</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team cohesion</td>
<td>.78**</td>
<td>.80**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R^2</td>
<td>.075**</td>
<td>.642**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>7.267**</td>
<td>92.922**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR^2</td>
<td>.561**</td>
<td>.584**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All numbers in each columns are standardized β-coefficients, ** p < .01.

As shown in table 3, hypothesis 1a and 1b, predicting a negative association between political behavior and task performance (β = -.61, p < .01) and between political behavior and team member satisfaction (β = -.60, p < .01), was fully supported. Hypothesis 2a and 2b, predicting a positive relationship between team cohesion and task performance (β = .78, p <
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.01) and between team cohesion and team member satisfaction (β = .80, p < .01), was also fully supported as evident in table 4.

**Possible confounding variables.** Management team size and management team level had no effect on task performance or team member satisfaction in regards to the proposed relationships as shown from step 2 in the table.

**Examination of mediated effects using PROCESS.**

PROCESS was used to investigate H3a and H3b, predicting that the relationship between political behavior and task performance and political behavior and team member satisfaction is mediated by team cohesion. The variables were run in model 4, basic mediation (Hayes, 2013). Management team size and management team level was included as covariates in the analysis.

Figure 2 illustrates the simplest of all intervening variable models, the *simple mediation model* (Hayes, 2009). In this model, a is the coefficient for X in a model predicting X on M. b and c' are the coefficients predicting both M and X on Y, respectively. In the language of path analysis, c' quantifies the direct effect of X, whereas the product of a and b quantifies the indirect effect of X on Y through M. The direct effect is interpreted as the part of the effect of X on Y that is independent of the pathway through M. The indirect effect is interpreted as the amount by which two cases who differ by one unit on X are expected to differ on Y through X's effect on M, which in turn affects Y. If all three variables are observed, then the total effect of X on Y is equal to the sum of the direct and indirect effects of X: c = c' + ab. This relationship can be rewritten as ab = c − c', which provides another definition of the indirect effect. The indirect effect is the difference between the total effect of X on Y and the effect of X on Y controlling for M, the direct effect.

![Diagram of mediation model](Image)

*Figure 2.*

Generic mediation model being examined
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Results from PROCESS examining the mediated effect of political behavior on task performance and team member satisfaction are shown below.

\[ a \rightarrow TC \]
\[ b = -.65^{**} \]
\[ b \rightarrow TP \]
\[ b = .55^{**} \]
\[ \text{PB} \rightarrow \text{TC} \]
\[ c' \]
\[ b = -.11^{*} \]

Note. PB = Political behavior, TC = Team cohesion, TP = Task performance, * \( p < .05 \), ** \( p < .01 \)

Figure 3.
Mediated effect of Political behavior on Task performance

Table 5.
Regression coefficients from mediation analysis predicting Task performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( b )</th>
<th>( SE )</th>
<th>( R^2 )</th>
<th>( F )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management team size</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management team level</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Path a</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political behavior ( \rightarrow ) Team cohesion</td>
<td>-.65**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Path b</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team cohesion ( \rightarrow ) Task performance</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total effect of political behavior (path c)</strong></td>
<td>-.46**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct effect of political behavior (path c')</strong></td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( R^2 )</th>
<th>( F )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>37.2**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( b \) = unstandardized regression coefficient. * \( p < .05 \). ** \( p < .01 \).
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![Diagram]

Note. PB = Political behavior, TC = Team cohesion, TMS = Team member satisfaction, ** p < .01.

Figure 4.
Mediated effect of Political behavior on Team member satisfaction

Table 6.
Regression coefficients from mediation analysis predicting Team member satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control variables</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>R^2</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management team size</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management team level</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Path a</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political behavior → Team cohesion</td>
<td>-.65**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Path b</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team cohesion → Team member satisfaction</td>
<td>.70**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total effect of political behavior (path c)</td>
<td>-.55**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct effect of political behavior (path c')</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model summary</strong></td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>27.0**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. b = unstandardized regression coefficient. * p < .05. ** p < .01.

**Indirect effects and significance tests.** The indirect effect can be estimated by the product of coefficients a and b in figure 2, or by the change in coefficient c when the unconditioned effect of a causal variable is controlled for the mediator. For example, the indirect effect of PB on TMS in figure 4, may be estimated as -.65 * .70 = -.45, or -.55 - -.10 = -.45.
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The "Sobel test" has been extensively used as significance test of mediated effects. However, it has been criticized, as it requires strong assumptions, like normal sampling distribution of indirect effect, which often are not satisfied. Competing tests are available that do not make this assumption and that are known to be more powerful than the Sobel test. At present, a bootstrap approach is commonly preferred, as generated through PROCESS.

Bootstrapping generates an empirical representation of the sampling distribution of the indirect effect by treating the obtained sample of size as a representation of the population in miniature, one that is repeatedly resampled during analysis as a means of mimicking the original sampling process. Once a resample is constructed, $a$ and $b$ are estimated this resampled data set and the product of the path coefficients recorded. This process is repeated for a total of times (typically at least 1000 is recommended).

An inference is made about the size of the indirect effect in the population sampled by using the estimates to generate a $ci\%$ confidence interval. If zero is not between the lower and upper bound of a $ci\%$ confidence interval, then the indirect effect is not zero with $ci\%$ confidence. This is conceptually the same as rejecting the null hypothesis that the true indirect effect is zero at the 100 $ci\%$ level of significance.

Simulation research shows that bootstrapping is one of the more valid and powerful methods for testing intervening variable effects (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004; Williams & MacKinnon, 2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect effects and Bootstrap results</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect effect of political behavior on task performance</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.46</td>
<td>-.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect effect of political behavior on team member satisfaction</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.60</td>
<td>-.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Standard errors and confidence intervals estimated by 1000 bootstrap replications.

As evident from table 7, bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals for the indirect effects based on 1000 bootstrap samples were entirely below zero, providing full support hypothesis 3a and 3b. Political behavior has a negative indirect effect on task performance,
through team cohesion ($b = -0.35$, $CI_{95\%} = -0.46$ to $-0.25$), and a negative indirect effect on team member satisfaction, through team cohesion ($b = -0.45$, $CI_{95\%} = -0.60$ to $-0.30$).

**Discussion**

In this study, comprising 155 management teams, the main aim was to investigate to which extent political behavior influences task performance and team member satisfaction, and whether this relationship is mediated through team cohesion.

A negative and significant relationship between political behavior and team outcomes was found; when team members engage in political behavior, it can influence team outcomes in a negative way and decrease team effectiveness. This is in line with earlier research on political behavior in management teams. The decrease in team effectiveness accompanying political behavior, have been explained by actions managers engage in that are intended to protect or promote self-interests, like withholding information, deciding matters outside meetings and forming alliances. These actions suggest that political behavior may trigger a negative working environment that leads to lower team effectiveness.

In addition, a positive and significant relationship between team cohesion and team outcomes was found; a team that is cohesive influence team outcomes in a positive manner and are more effective. This is in line with several meta-analyses examining the relationship between team cohesion and performance. When team members exhibit a liking for each other it is more likely that they will feel satisfied. In addition, team members that are willing to exert themselves for the tasks are also more likely to perform better.

To explore how political behavior influences team outcomes, this study examined if the effect of political behavior on task performance and team member satisfaction could be explained through the fact that political behavior diminish team cohesion, and that this effect contribute to the negative effect of political behavior on team outcomes. Political behavior was found to have a significant negative indirect effect on task performance and team member satisfaction through its effect on team cohesion. The fact that the indirect effects are substantially negative indicates that political behavior is one important factor when regarding teams’ effectiveness. The decrease in effectiveness implies that engaging in political behavior is harmful for the team through its negative influence on the level of team cohesion.

Management teams characterized by political behavior leads to difficulties for team members exerting themselves, feel group-pride or like each other, which in turn decrease performance and satisfaction.
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The correlations among the variables show that the control variables had different impacts. Management team size was, as expected, found to be significantly negatively associated with task performance, but not with team member satisfaction. Team size may negatively influence task performance, but not necessarily affect team members’ feelings of satisfaction. Level of management team was not found to have a significant impact on any of the outcome variables. However, when including the variables as covariates in the analysis, they had no impact on team outcomes. The insignificant relationship between management team size and team outcomes and the insignificant relationship between management team level and team outcomes indicates that the effect of political behavior and team cohesion is not affected by team size or team level.

Contribution to theory and future directions

This study has taken steps to explore a missing link in the literature about how political behavior in management teams influences team effectiveness through decreased levels of team cohesion. This relationship within teams has earlier been positioned theoretically with a need for empirical examination. While most research on organizational politics has concentrated on the influence politics has on the individual in the organization or on the organization as a whole, it has largely overlooked the role organizational politics plays at the team level. This is evident both within the team and in the external activities of the team. Moreover, this study is one of few empirical studies examining political behavior in a management team setting. Considering the arguments that political behavior is common among managers who have power to influence central decisions, there is certainly a need for an understanding on how this affects team effectiveness. Finally, research on teams has mainly focused on team processes influencing the effectiveness of teams, but has largely missed the impact internal organizational politics can exert on team effectiveness. Political behavior as a team-level process is likely to impact team-level performance or emergent states such as team cohesion, as this study has shown. Team cohesion studies examining the consequences of cohesion outnumber those examining antecedents, partly because of the difficulty of isolating those antecedents that are independent of the group. Thus, much less is known about cohesion’s antecedents (Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). This study contributes to the understanding of antecedents of team cohesion.

Political behavior in teams can also affect outcomes at the organizational level, in addition to harm team outcomes. Therefore, the political behavior and style of the team leader are important issues when discussing organizational politics. The research conducted
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to this date indicates that politically skilled leaders are associated with more effective performance (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005). However, the relationship between the political behavior of the leader and the political behavior of the team has yet to be examined. Do highly political leaders create highly political teams? Or are teams with highly political leaders low in internal political behavior because the leader dominates all power issues? Further research must begin to examine the antecedents and consequences of political behavior in teams as well as the conditions and circumstances that may affect the political behavior-effectiveness relationships. Uncovering some of the missing links in this direction with political behavior and teams can contribute to the generalization power of the field and its scholarly robustness, which might point to promising paths for future empirical research.

How management teams can become more effective

As shown in this study, a management team engaging in political behavior cannot ignore the likelihood of decreasing cohesiveness. Management teams can become effective if they are able to avoid using political behavior or deal successfully with it when it occurs. Management teams that are capable of not using political tactics and actions to influence decisions may perceive their teams as having constructive and positive team processes and group experiences. Teams characterized by little politics might create a more open environment where important issues are openly discussed, therefore making team members more equipped to make high qualitative decisions. Furthermore, they may additionally feel satisfied with high levels of positive emotions from being cohesive, as a sign of good team functioning. Several implications for management teams are suggested to become more effective.

Organizational justice. Team members may engage in political behavior when there is unequal distribution of resources, and these kinds of behaviors are often not sanctioned (Mayes & Allen, 1977). One measure to reduce politics will be to sanction behaviors of political character that are negative for effectiveness. This will also create more justice in the team, and several researches have suggested that organizational politics and organizational justice share an underlying mutual construct (e.g., Andrews & Kacmar, 2001). Inflexible and impersonal policies and procedures can make managers engage in political behavior as an attempt to restore control. Team members may then try to “destructure” procedures in an attempt to develop satisfying work environment for the team. That is, they use political actions to create or maintain justice (Dipboye, 1995). Justice then becomes a way to manage dysfunctional politics. If team members perceive that justice is optimal, they may not feel the
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need to have hidden agendas or withhold information from other team members, and in that way be more effective. Additionally, justice is found to be a predictor of trust and justly treated employees are more likely to show extra care and behave altruistically toward others (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). If team members are justly treated, they will more likely exert themselves for the success of the team, rather than withholding information to secure resources.

Leaders concerned with improving the effectiveness of their teams should make efforts to foster a favorable justice climate. This can be done in a variety of ways, from providing members more involvement into key decisions, to providing opportunities to appeal decisions, to making decisions consistently and neutrally. Past research has shown that managers can be trained to make decisions in a more procedurally just manner as a means of improving subordinate behavior (Skarlicki & Latham, 1996). Justice training may be particularly necessary for teams lacking collective members.

Participative decision-making and goal congruence. Employees may be less affected by political behavior if they have feelings of control and an understanding of events at work (Ferris et al., 1996; Ferris, Frink, et al., 1994). Managers are well positioned to address negative impacts of politics by explaining relevant issues, set direction, directly address resistance to their efforts, act quickly, and take follow-up action. This assertion is also supported by Witt, Andrews, and Kacmar (2000), that one way to address the negative impact of organizational politics is for the leader to engage in participative decision making (PDM) with his/her subordinates. PDM has been suggested as a method of increasing job satisfaction as it provides employees with a feeling of control, which makes them feel less threatened (Matteson & Ivancevich, 1987). Team members, who actively engage in discussion about important issues and, as a result, develop a consensus to resolve the issues, might be less characterized by political behavior as a team. Team members are likely to view the leader making the decision as more fair and appropriate than a process characterized by self-serving or political behavior. Thus, by formulating a decision outcome after hearing others’ views, the management team can promote the decision quality and implementation commitment essential to team effectiveness.

Furthermore, several researchers (e.g., Ferris & Treadway, 1989; Witt, 1998) have showed that enhancing goal congruence could be a solution to organizational politics. Both perceptions of politics and actual goal congruence have been shown to have interactive effects on organizational commitment and job performance (Witt, 1998). When team members have different priorities it can be difficult to understand the core goal of the team.
The relationship between political behavior, team cohesion and team effectiveness

This lack of understanding might adversely affect performance, as team members act on low-priority goals. Therefore, increasing understanding and decreasing politics may be good for team effectiveness. One way to address the negative impact of political behavior is for the MT leader to ensure that the other team members hold the appropriate goal priorities. By doing so, team members will have a greater sense of control over and understanding of the workplace.

Knowing the priorities can decrease the impact of politics on performance not only by supplying appropriate strategic or tactical direction but also by providing a sense of security when levels of politics are high. This sense of security may take two forms. One is a feeling that effort directed toward pursuit of those objectives will be rewarded. The other involves a reduced risk of being visible in the pursuit of objectives, including cooperating openly with others. Ultimately, a concerted decision provides both joint ownership and understanding, which may generate feelings of security and protection in a political environment (Witt et al., 2000). Furthermore, these feelings can contribute to increased cohesiveness within the team.

Team psychological safety. Teams with greater power centralization are less likely to perceive the environment as safe for interpersonal risk (Edmondson et al., 2003). Low level of psychological safety can make team members feel uncomfortable revealing uniquely held information. They may become preoccupied with concerns about the risk of sharing information and withhold important information, which can be perceived as securing own interests. Team members might also have a concern for not confirming the existing views within the group. In contrast, team members are more likely to share information if the climate fosters tolerance and acceptance, and the psychological safety is perceived as high. Greater psychological safety may enhance team members to identify opportunities for mutual gains by being open about their own interests and objectives, rather than defending their own interests. Additionally, risk taking is found to be a component that relates to the cohesion of the group (Stokes, 1983).

To benefit from being a cohesive team and prevent the negative effects of political behavior from occurring, management teams should try to improve conditions for risk taking, team member interaction and bonding, through a safe team environment. Teams that enhance team psychological safety and focus specifically on having an open environment and collaborative interactions, may buffer the negative effects of politics by maintaining cohesion. Management teams which provide team psychological safety (i.e. safety of interpersonal risk-taking) and behavioral integration, might feel less of a need to use political behavior and be more cohesive when they have team trust, meet on a regularly basis,
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empathize collaboration and make decisions in plenary. Powerful leaders can take actions that create psychological safety, such as acknowledging their own mistakes, actively inviting others’ ideas, and communicating a genuine interest in open discussion and experimentation (Edmondson et al., 2003).

**Limitations**

There are a number of limitations of the study. First, due to the use of self-reports and a cross-sectional approach, there are some difficulties with regards to causality. Some of the relationships may be reciprocal and causal over time. For instance, low effectiveness in itself can make it essential for team members to engage in political behavior to secure performance. Moreover, highly performing teams can be characterized as being more cohesive. In addition, team cohesion is commonly described as an emergent state that evolves over time (Marks et al., 2001). Future research in more controlled settings might have a greater chance to determine causality and offer more support to these results. Second, the likelihood of having common-method variance is high, due to all the variables in the survey being obtained from the same source, measured at the same time, and because the same participants answered all questions. This can, for instance, create artificial correlations among variables.

Third, task performance was measured through self-report, which implies the teams’ experience of achieved task performance and not real objective measures of task performance. The results are not able to show that the perceptual measures of task performance are predictors of objective or “real” measures of task performance. Fourth, the measurement-scales used from the survey *effect*, is developed based on research conducted on management teams in Scandinavia. A more precise measurement could be obtained if this study used well-known and validated scale measurements, for instance POPS (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991) for perception of politics. Measurement of political behavior in this study actually measures manager’s perception of how much the team is characterized by politics, and may not capture the true degree of political behavior among team members or one self. Finally, one may also benefit from controlling for other possible covariates, such as gender, tenure, level of experience and diversity in future studies. Since the sample of this study was restricted to include management teams only, the results from this study cannot be generalized to other populations.
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Conclusion

It is necessary to have an understanding of the effects of political behavior in the context of management teams in order to avoid negative team outcomes. The supported mediation effects explain one important thing; decreased cohesiveness is one possible important reason why political behavior is negatively associated with task performance and team member satisfaction in management teams. These findings suggest that a negative indirect effect of political behavior on team outcomes should be discussed in the light of diminished emergent states, like cohesion, and negative emotions and environment that may be provoked in a context characterized by politics. Management teams can benefit from being cohesive if they are capable of keeping political behavior to a minimum. By reducing political behavior and creating better conditions for team member interaction resulting in cohesion, management teams can become more effective.
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teams Organizational politics, justice, and support: Managing the social climate of the workplace (pp. 165-184).


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### Appendix A

Table 1.  
*Summary of survey scales and items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>ICC(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political behavior</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Often matters which should have been addressed in the management team meeting are decided outside the meeting.</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Some members of the management team have hidden agendas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. There are coalitions or alliances between some of the management team members.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Certain team members deliberately withhold information that may be important for the management team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. There are few power struggles between the members of our management team (-).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team cohesion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Our management team is not particularly cohesive (-).</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel proud to belong to this management team.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. There are not many team members who would be willing to exert themselves for the success of this management team (-).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The management team members seem to really like one another.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The management team members rarely take an overall perspective on the matters we discuss (-).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The management team is a tightly knit group of people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task performance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Our management team is very successful in its efforts.</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Our management team does not perform well as a team (-).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. You are given useful input when you bring up an issue in the management team.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We receive positive feedback on our performance as a management team.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It is difficult to see what added value the management team contributes to our organization (-).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. We consistently make high quality decisions in our management team.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. The vast majority of decisions made by the management team turn out to be beneficial for the organization.
8. Those affected by the decisions of the management team are generally very satisfied with the decisions we make.

**Team member satisfaction**

1. I develop my professional competencies by participating in this management team.
2. Working in this management team contributes to my learning.
3. I really enjoy working together with my management team colleagues.
4. Being part of this management team has had little impact on my development as a leader (-).
5. I get a lot of energy from our management team meetings.

0.79  .87  .58