
Managing sustainable development of government link companies (GLCs) in Malaysia through emotional intelligence and organisational politics

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Abstract: Organisational politics are becoming a common topic in management studies because of the negative influence it can have on the workforce. This study was conducted to examine the effect of emotional intelligence on organisational politics in government link companies (GLCs) in Malaysia. The study's research framework was supported by the leader member exchange (LMX) theory. Data was collected from middle to top level managers in the GLCs in Malaysia using a stratified random sampling method. Three hundred and twenty-five usable questionnaires were collected and analysed using partial least square structural equation model (PLS-SEM). The findings show that there is a significant link between emotional intelligence and organisational politics. This study provides an understanding that the presence of emotional intelligence can help in improving a leader's ability to manage the political environment. This study could be replicated within other industries by refining the items used as a measurement variable.

Keywords: sustainable organisation; emotional intelligence; GLCs; government link companies; organisational politics; leader member exchange theory.

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1 Introduction

The term ‘sustainable development’ was first defined in the 1980s in the Brundtland report where it was described as a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Mowforth and Munt, 2015). Although there are an increasing number of environmental and sustainability related studies, sustainable development has been understood in various ways by a variety of scholars from different disciplines (Wikström, 2010). For this study, sustainable development of organisations is defined as the continuous and long-term development and success of organisations (AlAqeel, 2012). It focuses on sustainable development in respect of organisations in a general, rather than environmental context (AlAqeel, 2012). Sustainable development is not only environmental protection, it is a process in which different policy areas such as economics, trade, energy, agriculture, industry, etc., are formulated in order to create a development that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable (Shyle, 2018).

On a related topic, emotional intelligence has emerged as a promising foundation and resource for the promotion of healthy and sustainable organisations (Di Fabio, 2017). Emotional intelligence has become one of the most important factors for achieving success in organisations because emotionally intelligent people are a source of competitive advantage. An emotionally intelligent person not only performs better but also creates an environment in which others can also perform better and become leaders at every level (Alkahtani, 2015). Emotionally intelligent employees and leaders can create a positive and productive environment in which to work. They try to understand situations from others’ perspectives and maintain a healthy relationship with them. They are more adaptive to changing needs, are honest and behave appropriately in critical situations. All these factors help in accomplishing organisational success.

Following this, the basic premise of sustainable development is potentially radical with possible effects on, among other things, growth and wealth distribution. There are potential ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in the sustainable development arena where the ability to obtain and maintain the concept of sustainable development may be politically advantageous (Tregidga et al., 2013). Organisational politics is a daily occurrence

and an essential part of organisational life that affects the members of the organisation. Politics is part of an organisation (Brouer et al., 2011). In fact, most of Malaysia's organisations face challenges in managing an environment which is changing rapidly nowadays (Saleh and Ndubisi, 2016).

Although most managers tend to deny the existence of organisational politics in their organisations, it is crucial to recognise its occurrence when managing its effects (Al-Tuhaih and Van Fleet, 2011). According to Meisler and Vigoda-Gadot (2014) there has been very little in the way of study into the relationship between emotional intelligence and organisational politics. A study by Shrestha and Baniya (2016) stated that further studies are needed to understand the relationship between emotional intelligence and organisational politics as there have been few studies investigating the relationship between the two variables in the work context. The above findings suggest the need for further research into the effects of organisational politics in different settings as these effects appear to vary (Abbas et al., 2014). Thus, this study was conducted to examine the effect of emotional intelligence on organisational politics in government link companies (GLCs) in Malaysia.

2 Literature review

2.1 Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence has, for quite some time, been a fascinating focus of dialogue among researchers (López-Domínguez et al., 2013). Although definitions for emotional intelligence vary, it can generally be described as the individual's ability to know and handle one's own feelings as well as being aware of the feelings of others (Mayer et al., 2000). Goleman (1995) contended that emotional intelligence comprised of "abilities such as being able to motivate one's self and persist in the face of frustration, to control impulse and delay gratification, to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think, to empathise and to hope". Emotional intelligence is also referred to as a mental process that involves: (1) recognition, (2) use, (3) understanding, and (4) management of a person's own emotions, as well as those of others, in order to resolve grievances and regulating behaviour (Mayer et al., 1999; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). In addition, emotional intelligence also focuses on general intelligence where it reflects on experiences and learning about emotions. However, Robbins and Coulter (2009) have criticised emotional intelligence. They claim that emotional intelligence is a vague concept and one which cannot be measured. Moreover, other researchers have contended that the emotional intelligence concept is unclear because different researchers focus on different skills.

Studies over the years suggest that emotional intelligence is crucial in a wide variety of settings, including education and business enterprises and is associated with success, productivity and leadership (Butler and Chinowsky, 2006; Cote and Nightingale, 2012; Hopkins et al., 2007). Gentry et al. (2011) found that an emotionally intelligent individual can bring about organisational improvements in decision making, instill enthusiasm, consideration of others and self-assurance and enhance the capacity to resolve problems. Research by Osieko et al. (2010) revealed that a manager's 'emotion' is a significant predictor of strategic decision making. The results suggest that, in volatile situations,

managers with high emotional intelligence and a positive attitude can focus on strategic solutions for issues which arise in the organisation.

2.2 Organisational politics

Although an important issue, organisational politics did not feature prominently in the literature until the 1970s. However, since then, studies have indicated that organisational politics should be analysed to gain a better understanding of organisations (Ullah et al., 2011). Interestingly, Mayes and Allen (1977) argued that organisational politics is employed to influence and achieve illegitimate goals or achieve legitimate goals using illegal tools. Ferris and Kacmar (1992) believed that organisational politics consists of strategic behaviours aimed at maximising personal benefits, thus organisational politics may be in conflict with collective goals or others' interests (Zadeh et al., 2013). However, Vigoda-Gadot and Kapun (2005) have long argued that politics is an endemic phenomenon in modern organisations and therefore deserves more attention and empirical examination.

The concept of organisational politics has been studied by different researchers in its different forms such as office politics, work place politics and organisational climate (Drory and Vigoda-Gadot, 2010). Since the increase in awareness of the importance of organisational politics, most of the studies have been conducted from different angles and focused on different political tactics that are applied in the current working environment. Politics is that 'must' factor which affects organisational procedure and influences all aspects of the business (Vigoda-Gadot and Talmud, 2010). The importance of organisational politics lies in its negative consequences and the effects on the productivity of the work place. Theoretical arguments strongly suggest that politics often interferes with normal organisational processes (decision making, promotions and rewards) and weakens productivity and performance at the individual and organisational level (Vigoda, 2002).

Although organisational politics are widely acknowledged as having a positive potential, studies show that the majority still see it as negative (Drory and Vigoda-Gadot, 2010; Othman, 2008; Poon, 2003). Usually political work environments are perceived negatively by individuals and may induce a sense of unfairness, deprivation and inequity (Gotsis and Kortezi, 2010; Harris and Wheeler, 2009; Ladebo, 2006; Vigoda-Gadot and Kapun, 2005). Therefore, those employees who view their organisation as being politicised tend to reject useful information (Drory and Vigoda-Gadot, 2010). Employee involvement in organisational politics could also affect the efficiency of decision making and any changes the organisation wants to implement (Ullah et al., 2011). Organisational politics has been studied in recent years, but researchers argue that the issue needs further investigation (Bodla et al., 2014; Vigoda and Cohen, 2002).

2.3 Hypothesis development

In the past, many researchers have recognised the importance of emotional intelligence and its place in organisational politics, but this belief is controversial. Some researchers have concluded that emotional intelligence and organisational politics have no significant effects on an organisation (Shrestha and Baniya, 2016), while others have said that a definite and significant negative relationship exists (Meisler and Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Samad, 2011). A study by Asad et al. (2014), found that there is a significant

positive relationship between emotional intelligence and organisational politics, while, Vigoda-Gadot and Meisler (2010) found that there was an insignificant relationship between emotional intelligence and organisational politic. A significant relationship between emotional intelligence and political skill was also found by Meisler and Vigoda-Gadot (2014). In addition, according to Samad (2011), emotional intelligence could be considered as one of the potential variables to be integrated into future organisational political studies or models and be applied to management practices dealing with organisational politics. Further studies by Samad (2011) of emotional intelligence and organisational politics have stated that leaders of the future need to have emotional intelligence to deal with the politics of the workplace. Robb (2012) makes the point that people with a high degree of emotional intelligence may still view a politically charged environment as stressful, but will have the emotional maturity to cope with and deal with it. Based on the literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Emotional intelligence has a significant effect on organisational politics.

3 Methodology

The target population of this study was employees, at middle to top level management, involved in decision making in the 20 largest Malaysian GLCs, as recognised by Khazanah Nasional. GLCs were chosen because GLCs are seen as playing a significant role in ensuring Malaysia achieves its mission of becoming a developed nation by 2020 (Norlaila and Suzana, 2011). According to Bartol et al. (2003), middle and top managers display equal levels of planning, organisation, leadership and control, and they have more direct responsibilities and opportunities to delegate than lower management levels. Data was collected through stratified random sampling. This technique was employed to ensure an equal representation of the variables for the study. The stratification was based on identifying the types of organisations in Malaysia which can be categorised as government link companies (GLC), multi-national companies (MNC), and small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) (Siwar and Harizan, 2009). It was then followed by the random selection of subjects from each stratum where GLCs were chosen as the sample. The population of GLCs was then categorised as service, plantation or finance. Middle to top level managers from the three sectors were then selected as the sample. The data was collected using a self-administered survey questionnaire. A total of 757 survey questionnaires were circulated. Based on the organisation chart of each of the organisations selected, there was a total of 757 middle to top level management personnel, however, only 339 responses were completed and collected. Fourteen of the surveys were deemed unusable because no attempt was made to answer the questions, or only part of a questionnaire was completed. Only 325 questionnaires were therefore considered useful for analysis, indicating a response rate of 42.9%. The measurement involved a five-point Likert scale. This study drew on Smart PLS 3.0 to test the research model, using a two-step approach by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The first step was an analysis of the confirmatory factor analysis where the validity and reliability could be confirmed, while the second step analysed the structural equation model for the evaluation of research hypotheses.

The theoretical model employed in this research is based on the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. LMX is based on role building, social exchange, mutual trust and equity (Walumbwa et al., 2011). This theory is employed in this study because it calls for a more balanced relationship between leaders and employees. A balanced relationship between leaders and members is essential, and fair treatment of the individual as an organisational strategy must be developed. Thus, this theory allows leaders to examine their own leadership in terms of the quality of their relationships with subordinates and allows them to be more responsive in working processes, thus improving their work units' productivity. In this way, overall organisational performance, strategic decision making and organisational policy can be improved.

4 Results

4.1 Demographic

The respondents for this study totalled 325. 127 were males representing a percentage of 39.1, 198 were females representing a percentage of 60.9. In terms of age groups, the majority was 20–30 years of age, (192 respondents representing 59.1%), 92 were 31 to 40 (28.3%), 32 were 41 to 50 (9.8%), while 9 were 51 to 60 (2.8%). In terms of race, the highest number of respondents was Malay (280 respondents representing 86.2%). As for marital status, 172 respondents, were single (52.9%) and 153 (47.1%) were married. In Table 1, it can be seen that 232 (72.4% of the total sample) had a bachelor degree, while 40 (12.3%) of the respondents had diplomas. Only four (1.2%) of the respondents had doctoral degree qualifications. The highest number of respondents was from the executive level with 213 respondents (65.6%). For number of years working in the organisation, most of the respondents were with their respective companies less than five years (223 respondents representing 68.6%). Finally, for the number of years working in the industry, 203 respondents (62.5%) had worked for less than five years in the industry.

Table 1 Demographic

<i>Demographic variable</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency (n =325)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Gender	Male	127	39.1
	Female	198	60.9
Age	20–30 years	192	59.1
	31–40 years	92	28.3
	41–50 years	32	9.8
	51–60 years	9	2.8
Race	Malay	280	86.2
	Chinese	25	7.7
	Indian	14	4.3
	Others	6	1.8

Table 1 Demographic (continued)

<i>Demographic variable</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency (n =325)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Marital status	Married	153	47.1
	Single	172	52.9
Highest level of education	SPM	8	2.5
	STPM/Certificate	3	0.9
	Diploma	40	12.3
	Bachelor degree	232	71.4
	Master degree	38	11.7
	Doctoral degree	4	1.2
Job position	CEO/President/Vice president	23	7.1
	General manger/Manager	89	27.4
	Executive	213	65.6
Number of years working in the present position	Less than five years	223	68.6
	6–10 years	68	20.9
	11–15 years	24	7.4
	Above 16 years	10	3.1
Number of years working in current industry?	Less than five years	203	62.5
	6–10 years	71	21.8
	11–15 years	34	10.5
	Above 16 years	17	5.2

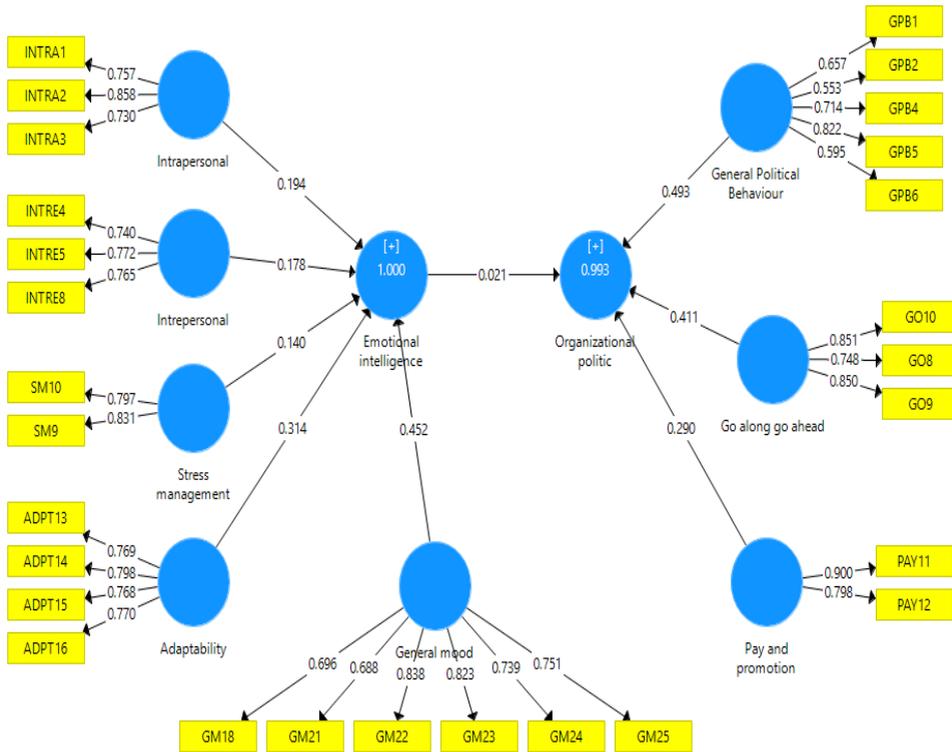
4.2 *Measurement model*

The measuring model focused on the evaluation of the validity and reliability of the models. Emotional intelligence and organisational politics have been constructed as a second order from Figure 1. The approach recommended in the PLS literature, which is the repeated indicator method for modelling the second order factors in the PLS analysis, was therefore followed (Hair et al., 2014). The conceptual model for this study includes the model of reflective measurement. For the reflective model, the factor loading analysis is first performed to determine whether any items used in this study are problematic. According to Hair et al. (2006) items under 0.60 should be deleted. As shown in Table 2, no items were deleted as the loading factor for all items ranged from 0.713 to 0.920, which surpasses the threshold of 0.6 as recommended by Hair et al. (2006). Next, the measurement model was tested by analysing the reliability and validity of the model. Data reliability was assessed using internal consistency reliability where composite reliability (CR) can be measured. From Table 2, it can be seen that the value for composite reliability ranged from 0.789 to 0.883, which is higher than the value suggested by Hair (2007). Thus, it means that all the constructs have high internal consistency and reliability.

Table 2 Reliability and validity

<i>First order construct</i>	<i>Second order construct</i>	<i>Loadings</i>		<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>	
Intrapersonal		INTRA1	0.761	0.826	0.614	
		INTRA2	0.863			
		INTRA3	0.720			
Interpersonal		INTRE4	0.746	0.802	0.575	
		INTRE5	0.812			
		INTRE6	0.713			
Stress management		SM9	0.829	0.797	0.663	
		SM10	0.800			
Adaptability		ADPT13	0.765	0.858	0.602	
		ADPT14	0.796			
		ADPT15	0.768			
		ADPT16	0.776			
General mood		GM18	0.741	0.883	0.558	
		GM19	0.733			
		GM20	0.737			
		GM21	0.747			
		GM22	0.774			
		GM23	0.751			
		Emotional intelligence	Intrapersonal			0.816
			Interpersonal			0.814
			Stress management			0.769
			Adaptability			0.898
General political behaviour		GPB1	0.810	0.855	0.664	
		GPB4	0.793			
		GPB5	0.840			
Go along go ahead		GO8	0.758	0.858	0.669	
		GO9	0.845			
		GO10	0.847			
Pay and promotion		PAY11	0.898	0.840	0.724	
		PAY12	0.801			
	Organisational politics	General political behaviour	0.919			
		Go along go ahead	0.934			
		Pay and promotion	0.867			

Figure 1 Structural model (see online version for colours)



The data validity of the measurement model was confirmed on the convergent and discriminant validity of variables (Chin, 2010). To measure convergent validity, each latent AVE variable should exceed 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). As presented in Table 2 below, the result shows that the value for AVE ranged from 0.508 to 0.787 and surpassed the 0.50 cut off value suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) which shows that the variable has meet the criteria for convergent validity. The discriminatory validity of this research is evaluated through two discrete considerations. Firstly, the Fornell and Larcker (1981) method was used and indicated that their independent variance was higher than the shared value with other constructs as shown in the table. As shown in Table 3, all square roots of AVEs are higher than all inter-construct correlations, discrimination is therefore confirmed (Hair et al., 2011). Secondly, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015) was used. In short, HTMT is the ratio of the between-trait correlations to the within-trait correlations. HTMT is the mean of all correlations of indicators across constructs measuring different constructs. Henseler et al. (2015) suggest a threshold value of 0.90 if the path model includes constructs that are conceptually very similar. In other words, an HTMT value above 0.90 suggests a lack of discriminant validity. When the constructs in the path model are conceptually more distinct, a lower, and thus more conservative threshold value of 0.85, seems warranted (Henseler et al., 2015) (refer Table 4). Thus, it can be concluded from the discussion that the measuring model is reliable and valid.

Table 3 Discriminant validity

	<i>Emotional intelligence</i>	<i>Organisational politics</i>
Emotional intelligence	0.768	
Organisational politics	0.559	0.667

The diagonal values in bold signify the average variance extracted (AVE) while the other entries signify the squared correlations.

Table 4 Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio

	<i>Emotional intelligence</i>	<i>Organisational politics</i>
Emotional intelligence		
Organisational politics	0.425	

Criteria: Discriminant validity is established at HTMT0.90.

4.3 Structural model

The results in Table 5 indicate significant relationships with positive path coefficients that were significant at 0.05 ($\beta = 0.192, t = 2.286, p < 0.01$). The findings are comparable with previous studies by Vigoda-Gadot (2010) and Meisler and Vigoda-Gadot (2014) who examined and discovered a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and organisational politics. Further studies by Samad (2011) and Chiva and Alegre (2008) of emotional intelligence and organisational politics have shown that future leaders need emotional intelligence to deal with workplace politics. Robb (2012) assumed that people with a high level of emotional intelligence still perceived a politically stressful environment, but have the emotional maturity to cope with and deal with it, as politics can reduce the employees’ willingness to help their co-workers (Sanders et al., 2015). This is why emotional intelligence and organisational politics are interconnected because people with a high level of emotional intelligence understand each other better (Fahid Riaz et al., 2018).

Table 5 Bootstrapping result

<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Path coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>t-Statistic</i>	<i>Decision</i>
H1: Emotional intelligence → Organisational politics	0.192	0.084	2.286**	Accepted

t-value is greater than 2.33 at $**p < 0.01$.

4.4 Importance performance matrix analysis (IPMA)

Importance performance matrix analysis (IPMA) helps in identifying the areas that need improvement, that can be addressed within the marketing or management activities and provide managerial insights to address and improve the identified areas of high importance and low performance (Hock et al., 2010; Schloderer et al., 2014). Figure 2 and Table 6 show the IPMA of organisational politics. The IPMA results enable the pinpointing of determinants with relatively high importance and relatively low importance. The target construct of this study is organisational politics. Figure 2

schematically shows the IPMA results of the organisational politics target variable, general mood has the highest importance (0.209). Consequently, in order for managerial activities to reduce the level of organisational politics, they should focus on the general mood constructs. General mood is important as once you are aware of an emotion you can determine its cause and change it. A very extended mood can also develop into a character trait and it is important to note that a leader’s mood has the greatest impact on performance. In other words, in a performance context, expressions of a positive moods by leaders signal that leaders consider the progress towards goals to be good. As a result, leaders in a positive mood convey a sense of security to employees that, in turn, invites the employees to engage in agreeable and friendly behaviour. Thus, in a political environment, leaders who are good at managing their emotions will know what actions need to be taken.

Figure 2 Importance performance map (see online version for colours)

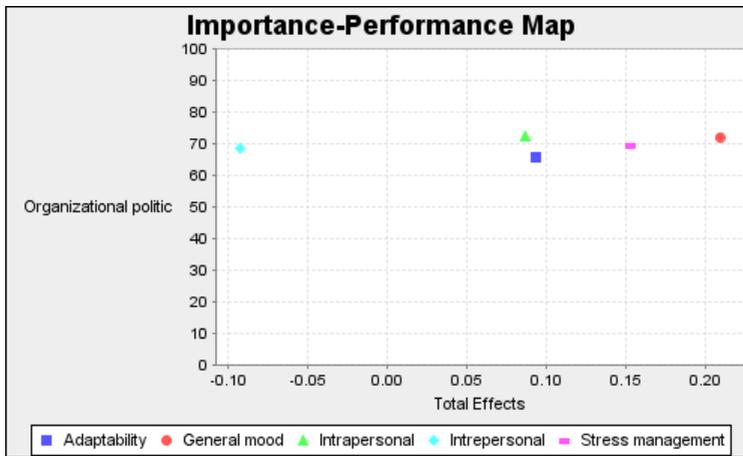


Table 6 Importance performance map (IPMA) results

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Performance</i>
Adaptability	0.093	65.757
General mood	0.209	71.935
Intrapersonal	0.086	72.603
Interpersonal	-0.092	68.389
Stress management	0.152	69.206

Bold values indicate the highest importance (total effect) and highest performance value.

5 Discussion

The study findings reveal that emotional intelligence has a significant effect on organisational politics with a positive coefficient path ($\beta = 0.192$), which is significant at 0.01 ($t = 2.286$). The result is consistent with previous findings which found emotional intelligence to have a significant effect on organisational politics (Meisler and Vigoda-

Gadot, 2014). Samad (2011) also highlighted that emotional intelligence could be considered as one of the potential variables to be integrated into future organisational political studies or models and to be applied in management practices when dealing with organisational politics. This is supported by previous research which found that people with higher emotional intelligence have a more attuned control of their emotions and feelings, thus even when facing a stressful situation, they are able to control them more effectively than those who have low emotional intelligence (Utami et al., 2014).

Employees are sensitive to political decisions made in their organisations and individuals may react in different emotional and behavioural ways. Individuals with higher emotional intelligence will face organisational politics better than those with a lower level of understanding of emotional intelligence. It provides the idea that by increasing a leader's emotional intelligence it will affect the organisational politics, whereby the practical application of emotional intelligence skills and behaviours can enhance a leaders' skills in managing the political situations that arise in their organisation. Therefore, developing the leader's emotional intelligence is critically important for organisations because the presence of emotional intelligence will benefit the organisations by enhancing organisational performance.

The findings of this study also highlight two major implications: a practical contribution and a theoretical contribution. The findings of this paper offer additional support to past studies. It has provided insights into the interactions between the leaders and members that provide different outcomes for subordinates in similar settings. The research findings are useful for management to develop effective future strategies and to enhance the level of employee productivity. This study highlights the crucial role of employees' emotional intelligence in relation to organisational politics, thus organisations can learn from these findings and organise training workshops and learning sessions for employees to increase the level of their emotional intelligence. The presence of emotional intelligence will help reduce the negative aspects of organisational politics in an organisation. Besides, a clear understanding of organisational politics and its consequences can help organisational consultants, administrators and managers to incorporate policies and strategies that can halt the occurrence of negative organisational politics and foster positive attitudes in employees. It also suggests that organisational leaders fight political behaviour when it is dysfunctional and rampant in an organisation. Managers who are highly involved in organisational politics could achieve organisational goals with the help of organisational politics. Therefore, managerial involvement in organisational politics is necessary for the survival of the organisation.

Regarding the theoretical contributions, for this study, the LMX theory is used, the findings of this study give insights into the application of the LMX theory and provide an understanding the variables used in this study. Therefore, to manage organisational politics, leaders need to develop political skills which involve the ability to interact and work with others. In addition, it suggests that the quality of exchanges between leaders and their followers is dependent upon the congruence of their emotional intelligence levels, where emotional intelligence of leaders and their followers jointly contribute to the development of high-quality LMX relationships. The findings of this study therefore add value to the LMX literature. It also enriches the body of knowledge of the role of emotional intelligence in reducing the level of negative organisational politics in an organisation. This study also contributes to the literature on emotional intelligence as it attempts to examine the effect of emotional intelligence on organisational politics in the Malaysian context, as well as the literature on organisational politics.

6 Conclusion

Organisations today face many and various challenges when striving for sustainable success. Many studies have found that the better a person recognises emotion, the better they manage organisational politics and the interpersonal aspects of their working life. Thus, leaders with high emotional capacity are more successful dealing with the politics of the workplace. This study deals with similar notions and has applied the scope in managing sustainable development of GLCs in Malaysia. It has found that managers who display high levels of emotional intelligence can act more expediently, skilfully and quickly than others to fix newly discovered flaws and organisational weaknesses, long-term secret relationships and bilateral darkness. This study also explains why emotional intelligence and organisational politics are interlinked. The findings of this study will be useful for industries such as SME, and MNCs, and similar companies, to be sustained and organisationally developed.

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