

Managers' autonomy, strategic control, organizational politics and strategic planning effectiveness: An empirical investigation into missing links in the hotel sector



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Strategic control is a powerful antidote for the practice of organization politics.
- A high level of managers' autonomy leads to more organizational politics.
- Organizational politics negatively influence strategic planning effectiveness.
- Strategic control and managers' autonomy can vary independently.
- Strategic planning practices within the hospitality and tourism industries.

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on the impact of managerial autonomy and strategic control on organizational politics and show how the latter influence effectiveness of strategic planning. In doing so, it outlines particular directions that a rebalanced strategic management research agenda may take. Whereas organizational politics have received sustained interest in the management literature, its conceptual and empirical examination in the tourism industry has been meagre. This study contributes to fill this gap by analyzing data from 175 four- and five-star hotels located in a less researched region, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The findings indicate that high levels of autonomy combined with low levels of control negate the effectiveness of strategic planning by increasing organizational tensions. Drawing on political and organizational perspectives, an interpretation of the results and policy implications are discussed. The study also delineates interesting research avenues for further research on organizational politics in the tourism industry.

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1. Introduction

A broad range of studies have conceptualized organizations as political coalitions of members with often divergent goals; and they have also attested to both the ubiquity of organizational politics and to their widespread destructive impact on organizational outcomes (Elbanna, 2010; Kacmar & Baron, 1999; Kreutzer, Walter, & Cardinal, 2014). However, with few and less related exceptions (e.g., Buonocore, 2010; Hung, Yeh, & Shih, 2012), there has been very little theoretical and empirical research on organizational politics in the hotel sector, despite its importance and its treatment for decades in the management literature. The research reported in

this article aims to help to fill this gap by examining the impact of two antecedents of organizational politics (managers' autonomy and strategic control), and one of its outcomes (the effectiveness of strategic planning).

It has been widely argued in the literature that organizational factors are influential in predicting political behavior (Shrivastava & Grant, 1985). When managers, for instance, allocate resources, they are affected by how much autonomy they have and what level of control they are subject to. This notion has received support from several authors who show that organizational factors exert more significant effects on political behavior than do other environmental and manager-related factors (e.g., Elbanna & Child, 2007; Papadakis, Lioukas, & Chambers, 1998). Given the above, this article proposes a framework to help managers understand how two important organizational factors, which are less researched in

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the literature of political behavior, influence organizational politics. These are autonomy and control. Although autonomy gives managers greater flexibility to act, at the same time, strategic control provides means for tighter top-management control over their actions (Fig. 1).

Autonomy describes the independence and authority given to managers or teams within organizations to develop new thoughts or proposals and carry them through to completion (Hughes & Morgan, 2007). As argued by Drafke and Kossen (2002), autonomy indicates the freedom of an individual to perform tasks and control work. It represents a decentralized decision structure or an organizational context where executives can act without prior approval from top management and sometimes even without their awareness (Andersen & Nielsen, 2009; Mintzberg, 1994). In other words, it captures the extent to which middle managers can act and decide without top management approval. Some researchers have found that there is no direct relationship between middle managers' autonomy and firm performance. However, they report that such autonomy indirectly affects organizational performance or planning effectiveness through other organizational variables, such as capabilities (e.g., Ouakouak, Ouedraogo, & Mbengue, 2014) and adaptive behavior (Andersen & Nielsen, 2009). Although middle managers' autonomy has been emphasized in the literature for quite some time, very little is known about its role in organizational politics and thus an aim of this article is to establish how far autonomy may contribute to organizational politics.

The strategic management literature clearly advocates the importance of strategic controls system to monitor strategic progress and ensure the execution of strategic plans (Goold & Quinn, 1990). The inherent uncertainty and novelty of strategic planning processes expand the likelihood that strategic planning will face attempts of political influence by organizational actors (Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, & Pandy, 1989). Strategic control addresses the central strategic problem of an organization seeking to align the activities and performance of managers with its strategic objectives (cf., Sitkin, Cardinal, & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2010) and therefore it provides the basis for decisions on actions to correct deviations from strategic objectives (Goold & Quinn, 1990). We regard strategic control as a process in which organizations use strategic objectives as standards, measure the performance of their strategic plans, compare this performance to standards, and feed information back about undesirable variances in order to take relevant corrective actions. Although there is a broad consensus that strategic control or monitoring is one of the key activities of strategic management (Nixon & Burns, 2012), it is a less researched area in organizations (Berry, Coad, Harris, Otley, & Stringer, 2009) and the emphasis on this activity is less than on other activities, such as formulating strategic plans (Elbanna, 2013). This gap between the

strategy process and strategic control has been the subject of recurring criticism (Marginson, 2002). For example, there has been comparatively little empirical research to explore whether and how strategic control influences organizational politics. This, in itself, exemplifies a gap in the strategic management literature. Moreover, the research that has been carried out either addresses other types of control, such as organizational controls (e.g., Kreutzer et al., 2014) or examines different aspects of politics in the hotel sector, e.g., political skills (e.g., Hung et al., 2012). Research like ours is, therefore, required in order to understand the role of strategic control in confining political activities which in turn influence the attainment of organizational objectives.

Further, we speculate on the extent to which the empirical setting influences the results of prior research concerning organizational politics; that is, how generalizable to the hotel sector are the findings about organizational politics from other industries, which can provide managerial insights into ways of improving the effectiveness of strategic planning. Deriving quantitative relationships about the effect of these factors across a wide spectrum of hotels would enhance the awareness of the determining factors and outcomes of organizational politics in the hotel sector. To the best of our knowledge, almost no research has been done in this sector into the relationships that are examined in this study although the hotel sector is a key industry in many economies (Fraj, Matute, & Melero, 2015) including those of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Alpen Capital, 2014).

This sector is highly sensitive to business, political and economic conditions and its growth can have a strong influence on performance of hotel companies (Chen, 2010) which in turn influences the dynamics of organizational politics (Elbanna, Thanos, & Papadakis, 2014). The outlook for the GCC hospitality industry is positive with an increasing demand and consequently capacity expansion supported by strategic initiatives of the regional governments such as upcoming mega events in Qatar (e.g., the world cup 2022) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (e.g., the Expo 2020) (Alpen Capital, 2014). Therefore, the setting of the GCC hotel sector is particularly relevant to test our research hypotheses given the high dynamics of hotels' strategies in the region nowadays and consequently the potential role of organizational politics accompanying such dynamics.

In conclusion, our research objective is to answer two pressing research questions in the literature of strategic management in general and that of the hotel sector in particular. These are (1) how far do managers' autonomy and strategic control influence organizational politics? (2) What is the effect of organizational politics on the effectiveness of strategic planning? As concluded by the most recent review of studies on strategic planning in the hospitality and tourism context (Phillips & Moutinho, 2014), this study

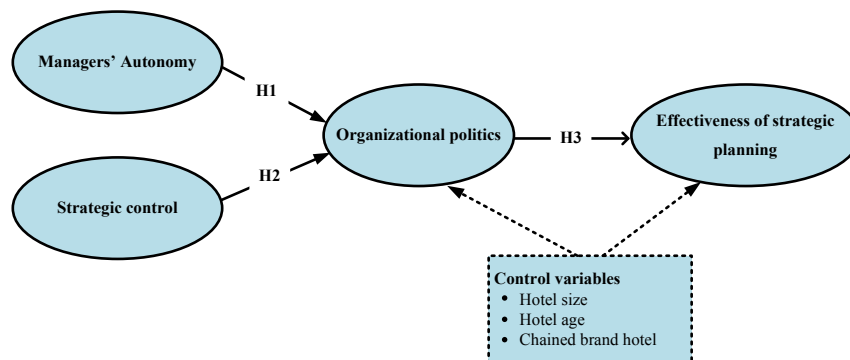


Fig. 1. Managers' autonomy, strategic control, organizational politics and strategic planning effectiveness.

and similar research (e.g., Athiyaman & Robertson, 1995; Avci, Madanoglu, & Okumus, 2011) are urgently needed to advance our knowledge on strategic planning practices within the hospitality and tourism scholarly field, which remains paradoxical and is the least understood.

2. Theory and hypotheses

In our proposed research model, organizational politics are influenced by managers' autonomy and strategic control and in turn influence strategic planning performance. This section seeks to justify the variables selection and develop the study hypotheses. The discussion starts with the main variable (i.e. organizational politics) and then move forward with its determinants (i.e. managers' autonomy and strategic control), before discussing its outcome (i.e. the effectiveness of strategic planning).

2.1. Organizational politics

The political perspective in organizations is concerned with the ways in which members of organizations can influence organizational decisions either through the use of power or through actions they take to exert influence such as coalition formation; agenda control; tactics of timing; the use of outside consultants; bargaining or negotiation; and tactics concerning the control and manipulation of information (Elbanna, 2010). This view assumes that organizational choices are the result of a process in which people have various preferences and form coalitions in order to defend their preferences; and in which the goals of the most powerful prevail (Stone, 2002). Traditionally, authors regard political behavior as a destructive use of power in search of personal goals, even to the point where it contravenes organizational rules or interests (Child, Elbanna, & Rodrigues, 2010). It can be divisive, often pitting people against other formal systems of power, such as formal authority (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). We argue that the significance of organizational politics means that there is a great deal at stake for those who stand to gain or lose from their consequences, materially or in reputation. Given that political behavior is commonplace in organizations, a good understanding of such behavior may serve to forestall its harmful outcomes.

Pettigrew (1973: 20–21) argues that “as long as organizations continue as resource-sharing systems where there is an inevitable scarcity of those resources, political behavior will occur”. Important organizational actions involve a political problem of reconciling conflicting interests in addition to a technical problem of struggling to determine the best decision given a number of considerations (Hickson, Butler, & Wilson, 2001). This situation increases political behavior between the advocates of competing proposals.

As argued by Mintzberg (1985), managers at work may frequently depart from rationality since the organization is typically a political arena, a conclusion which raises uncertainties about the soundness of the rational model. Cyert and March (1963) incorporate this political realism into their behavioral theory of the firm. They argue that conflicts of interest are based on variances in the interests and goals of different organizational groups which is also a normal aspect of organizational culture. These writers therefore regard organizational decision processes as political since decision makers are different and have distinct motivations for participating in different decisions (Butler, 2002). In other words, political behavior is basically created by the combination of interdependence and variation among people who compete for limited resources in ways that can create conflict between them (Mumford & Pettigrew, 1975). The interplay of power, interests and conflict between people in organizations means that the process of making decisions can be naturally regarded as political (Wilson, 2003) since

individuals and groups practice political behavior to defend their positions and interests in the organization.

2.2. Autonomy and organizational politics

Daft (1989) suggests that managers' power is a function of their autonomy which influences their perception of organizational politics. Managers' autonomy can be defined as the extent to which managers have freedom to perform tasks and control their work (Drafke & Kossen, 2002). It reflects to what extent managers one level below the top management team can take strategic decisions on their own and it can be used to assess the level of decentralization in organizations (Andersen, 2001). It also conveys the freedom to managers that encourages them to think, decide and act without interference (Hughes & Morgan, 2007). As explained by Ouakouak et al. (2014), autonomy incorporates two aspects: (1) the extent to which managers are allowed to make decisions without the need to get approval from higher hierarchical levels; and (2) the ability of managers to work without much supervision and control (Wilkinson, 2004).

The literature reveals that the associations between autonomy and other organizational variables such as competencies and outcomes can be complex (Dimitratos, Liouka, & Young, 2014). This complexity can be seen from two standpoints. First, these associations may be direct or indirect, with autonomy affecting organizational outcomes through mobilizing or facilitating other organizational variables such as organizational politics or capabilities (Ouakouak et al., 2014). Second, the outcomes of autonomy are mixed (Psychogios, Wilkinson, & Szamosi, 2009) and can have potentially negative as well as positive effects on organizations (Birkinshaw & Ridderstråle, 1999; Dimitratos et al., 2014). On the one hand, autonomy may increase the sense of responsibility (Andersen & Nielsen, 2009; Ouakouak et al., 2014), ownership of organizational problems (Morgenson, Delaney-Klinger, & Hemingway, 2005), employees' efficiency (Andersen & Nielsen, 2009), innovation performance (Zehir & Özsahin, 2008) subsidiary development (Birkinshaw & Pedersen, 2009), and flexibility (Hughes & Morgan, 2007). It can also allow an organization to be transformed from a control-oriented culture to a commitment-driven one (Walton, 1999). On the other hand, there is a more critical view of autonomy. Beyond its positive perspectives, it may increase work pressure and stress (Gallie, White, Cheng, & Tomlinson, 1998; Kalleberg, Nesheim, & Olsen, 2009), require a rather long-term process of adaptation within the organization (Psychogios et al., 2009), and lead to drift and resource wastage (Hughes & Morgan, 2007). For this reason, managers should be mindful in the exercise of autonomy and consider cautiously the circumstances in which it is worthwhile (Hughes & Morgan, 2007).

Since strategic management and organizational behavior-focused research have considered autonomy as a prerequisite of organizational politics (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992), autonomy is viewed in this study as an input that drives organizational politics. For example, the absence of direct supervision is one of the most striking characteristics of organizations with high employee autonomy (Szulkin, 1999), which may be perceived by some as a relief from regulations and policies (Styhre, 2004) and hereafter may provide more room to act politically. Hence, we argue that if managers are given the freedom to make their own work-related decisions with less supervision, the possibility of political behavior will be higher. In other words, this may increase the practice of political behavior as managers at dispersed decision locations have the power to act in certain ways to defend their own interests (Child et al., 2010). Despite the complexities referred to above, the apparent conclusion is that autonomy represents an inherent motive of organizational politics and therefore too much

autonomy is likely to increase politics. As a result, we argue that giving managers more autonomy and discretion in making decisions may result in a variety of political decisions and hence autonomy can be identified as one of the antecedents of organizational politics. Formally:

Hypothesis 1. Managers' autonomy is positively related to organizational politics.

2.3. Strategic control and organizational politics

With our definition of organizational politics as the pursuit of self-interests at the expense of organizational interests (Dayan, Elbanna, & Benedetto, 2012; Dean & Sharfman, 1996; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992), and with strategic control being designed, by definition, to align the goals of individuals with strategic goals (Sitkin et al., 2010), it may be insightful to study the relationship between strategic control and organizational politics (Kreutzer et al., 2014). It is also argued that the economic crisis that erupted in 2008 and subsequent economic downturn have intensified the need of companies for financial and strategic control (Hopwood, 2009) in order to curb the political actions of managers and secure organizational interests (Elbanna, Di Benedetto, & Gherib, 2015). In such a situation, strategic control is needed to guard against the likelihoods that managers will do something that their organizations do not want them to do (Malmi & Brown, 2008), such as acting politically to secure their own interests.

Put differently, effective strategic control increases the possibility that people in organizations will behave in ways consistent with the objectives of their organizations (Flamholtz, Das, & Tsui, 1985). In pursuing this probability, top management teams seek to control the behavior of middle management (Flamholtz et al., 1985) and allow efficient decision-making (Berry et al., 2009). In this sense, strategic control, along with its rules, systems, values, practices and the other activities that management adopt will help to direct employees' behavior toward organizational interests rather than their own interests (Otley, Broadbent, & Berry, 1995). Strategic control can also indicate the standards to be achieved in relation to organizational goals, thereby controlling the activities of people to ensure they are in line with the desired organizational outcomes (Malmi & Brown, 2008).

Establishing accountability for variations in performance, and linking behavior to targets curb political actions in organizations in different ways (c.f., Malmi & Brown, 2008). First, measures can be taken that allow the quantification of activities or decisions. Second, standards of performance or targets can be set. Third, a feedback process can make it possible to compare the outcomes of activities or decisions with the standard, in order to identify any variance. Fourth, corrective actions can be taken on the basis of reported performance measures to modify people's behavior or their underlying activities if they do not support the organization's objectives.

Kreutzer et al. (2014) have found that different types of organizational control can mitigate political influence attempts and consequently their detrimental effects. Similarly, the control process offers a chance for clear personal assessment against specific performance targets which is preferable to the opportunities in more political organizations (Goold & Quinn, 1990). The theory is that the stress built into the control process may destroy or at least diminish the political bids of managers to secure their own benefits. In this way, middle managers may even realize that strategic control will interfere with engagement in political behavior. Hence, strategic control may prevent managers from abusing their power by taking advantage of opportunist possibilities. Such control represents safeguards and strict rules agreed between managers.

In line with the above arguments, managers who perceive that

they are under control may be less willing to play politics. Formally:

Hypothesis 2. Strategic control will diminish organizational politics.

2.4. Organizational politics and effectiveness of strategic planning

Political processes are likely to discourage a comprehensive and precise analysis of the development and implementation of strategic plans; consequently, they increase the possibility that these plans will be poorly formulated and unsuccessfully implemented (Child et al., 2010). This is because political behavior leads to numerous shortcomings in organizations (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992), such as the restriction and distortion of information; wasted time; and incomplete understanding of the environment leading to a failure to focus on environmental constraints. Thus, political behavior may serve to create chaos, by continually defending the self-interests of decision makers and restricting the information exchange and analysis, which opens windows for decision makers to act in a way that helps them to defend their own goals rather than these of organizations. For example, people who act politically may disregard some feasible choices because they conflict with their own goals.

Moreover, many political tactics, such as manipulating information, lead to a partial disclosure of relevant information (Pettigrew, 1973). Organizational politics are consequently expected to distort the information necessary for effective strategy formulation and implementation. This behavior contrasts with straightforward methods of eliciting opinion in favor of the best alternative, which depend on sharing information and open discussion during strategy making and implementation (Dayan et al., 2012; Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). The result is that political behavior may lead organizational actors to decide based on incomplete and inaccurate information, giving rise to unsatisfactory outcomes (Dean & Sharfman, 1996).

Along the same lines, organizational politics are divisive. This divisiveness may constrain consensus on key strategic issues and on the allocation of responsibilities for carrying out strategies effectively (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003). More intense organizational politics are also linked to less consensus among managers over their organization's mission (Zahra, 1987). Since politics are time-consuming, they may also delay decisions and consequently lead to the likelihood of losing important opportunities (Elbanna et al., 2015; Pfeffer, 1992), wasting organizational resources and delaying strategy implementation (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

Empirically, most previous research has concluded that organizational politics adversely influence organizational outcomes (Bourgeois & Eisenhardt, 1988; Elbanna et al., 2015). For example, there is evidence that organizational politics are negatively associated with overall firm performance (Zahra, 1987), task performance (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009), strategic initiatives performance (Kreutzer et al., 2014), and strategic decisions performance (Dean & Sharfman, 1996; Elbanna & Child, 2007). Likewise, the project management literature reveals that politics have a negative impact on project outcomes (Pinto, Pinto, & Prescott, 1993; Wall & Callister, 1995). According to this literature, such negative impact is seen in the amount and quality of the work performed by decision-makers, the efficiency of their operations, and the effectiveness of their interactions (Robey, Smith, & Vijayasathy, 1993; Wall & Callister, 1995). Taking the above into consideration, it is expected that organizational politics to be negatively associated with different aspects of strategic planning performance. Formally:

Hypothesis 3. Organizational politics have a negative effect on strategic planning effectiveness.

3. Methods

3.1. Data collection

Data for this study are from a survey of hotels in two GCC countries, namely, the UAE and Qatar. Sampling was limited to four- and five-star hotels; only hotels that had strategic plans were included in this study as an attempt to make sure that the hotels in the sample frame had at least some form of strategic planning process. After eliminating hotels with less than four-star status from the initial sampling population, the overall sample was reduced from 939 to 312 hotels. From the targeted 312 hotels, 190 hotels responded (an initial response rate of 61%). 15 surveys were dropped due to insufficient data, irrelevant respondents and the low ranking of the respondent hotels. The final sample consisted of 175 hotels, which represents a response rate of 56%. Data were collected in 2014 and the survey lasted approximately four months. In data collection, the four biggest cities in the UAE and Qatar were targeted. These are Dubai, Doha, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah (data collected from 80, 42, 32 and 21 hotels respectively). Our sample and respondents are described in [Table 1](#).

The questionnaire was developed and administered in English since it is the first language in hotels in both the UAE and Qatar (cf., [Elbanna, 2012](#)). In order to ensure content validity, the targeted respondents were managers who (1) were familiar with strategic planning practices in their hotels, and (2) had worked in their hotels for one year at least. The average number of years which the respondents had spent in the sampled hotels was 6 years. Based on two criteria, specifically, prior experience in conducting similar research projects and a recommendation from other scholars, a professional market research company was used to collect data. The research team was trained before going into the field. Data were gathered through individual data collection interviews using a fully standardized questionnaire (with answers on a five-point scale).

3.2. Measures of constructs

Existing multi-item scales that have exhibited strong measurement properties in research addressing strategic planning were used for all the constructs associated with managers' autonomy, strategic control, organizational politics, and planning effectiveness. [Table 2](#) describes the measures.

Managers' autonomy was evaluated using three items adopted from [Andersen and Nielsen \(2009\)](#). Each respondent was asked to assess managers' autonomy below the top management team, on a

five-point Likert type scale with “definitely false” at the low end (1) and “definitely true” at the high end (5). Following [Titus, McDougall, and Slevin \(2010\)](#), strategic control was measured on three items using a five-point Likert type scale (1, “not at all”; 5, “to a very great extent”). Because of its symbolic and often hidden nature, prior work taking a perceptual approach to measure organizational politics was followed (e.g., [Ferris & Kacmar, 1992](#); [Kreutzer et al., 2014](#)). The scale of organizational politics was adopted from [Harris and Ogbonna \(2006\)](#) which was originally adapted from work by [Piercy \(1987\)](#). In using this scale, the respondents were provided with the following definition of organizational politics, “intentional actions of influence taken by people to enhance their own interests.” Then we asked them to consider this definition and place their hotels on one of five points on the scale (from 1, “not political at all” to 5, “highly political”). Given that an effective strategy process can lead to different planning benefits beyond the traditional financial dimensions of performance ([Gerbing, Hamilton, & Freeman, 1994](#)), strategic planning effectiveness was assessed using six items derived from prior research ([Bryson, 2004](#); [Elbanna, 2013](#); [Poister & Streib, 2005](#)). Respondents were asked to indicate how far the strategic planning processes in their hotels generated either harmful or beneficial impacts in relation to these items (1, “very harmful”; 5, “very beneficial”) which reflect three lines of potential benefits from strategic planning in the sampling organizations, namely, strategic direction, fit with the environment, and organizational performance.

In addition to the above four variables, three control variables were incorporated in the study: hotel size, hotel age, and membership of a chain of hotels. Considering the possible impact of hotel size ([Avci et al., 2011](#); [Hughes & Morgan, 2007](#)) and hotel age ([Elbanna, 2012](#); [Fraj et al., 2015](#); [Hughes & Morgan, 2007](#); [Ju & Zhao, 2009](#)) on autonomy, organizational politics, strategic processes, and organizational outcomes, both size and age were incorporated in the study as control variables. Hotel size was objectively measured by the number of full time employees, and hotel age was quantitatively measured as the number of years since the sampled branch of the hotel had first been established. To consider the possible impact of being part of a hotel chain or an independent hotel on strategic processes and outcomes ([O'Neill & Carlback, 2011](#)), we controlled for the impact of this variable by using a dummy variable to distinguish between an independent hotel (coded 0) and a chained-brand hotel (coded 1). In recent years, the topic of “brand versus independent hotels” has become increasingly popular. Chain hotels, for example, may tend to embrace formal and long-term strategic planning whereas independent hotels may imply short-term and informal strategic planning.

The survey instrument containing all the above-mentioned scales was pretested with a group of hotel executives and another group of academics. According to the feedback received, some items underwent refinement in order to improve their clarity and readability. The preliminary assessment of the measures indicated a high degree of content validity and internal consistency as discussed below in the section on data analysis and results.

In response to the research design, informants could have provided data consistent with their beliefs about the way in which managers' autonomy and strategic control should link to organizational politics and how the latter related to strategic planning performance; thus, common method variance is a potential source of measurement error. Furthermore, retrospective accounts of past facts are supposed to be more accurate than accounts of beliefs and perceptions, which are more subjective and vulnerable to the effects of cognitive bias and faulty memory ([Golden, 1992](#)). In light of related research ([Elbanna, 2012](#); [Miller, 2008](#); [Slater & Atuahene-Gima, 2004](#); [Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015](#)), [Table 3](#) shows the

Table 1
Profiles of sample and respondents.

Sample	Respondents
Size, age and localization	Job titles
Average number of employees: 213	Sales/marketing managers: 30%
Average age of hotels: 10 years	HR managers: 16%
% of local employees: 5%	General managers: 14%
% of expatriate employees: 95%	Financial managers: 9%
Hotel ownership	Duty managers: 9%
Private sector: 144 hotels (82%)	Front office managers: 8%
Publicly held: nine hotels (5%)	Assistant hotel managers: 4%
Joint venture: 22 hotels (13%)	Others, e.g., operations, regional, IT: 10%
Hotel ranking	Gender
Four stars: 95 hotels (54%)	Male: 81%
Five stars: 80 hotels (46%)	Female: 19%
Hotels chain	Education
Chained-brand hotel:	University degree: 88 respondents (50%)
143 hotels (82%)	Graduate degree: 73 respondents (42%)
Independent hotel:	Not provided: 14 respondents (8%)
32 hotels (18%)	

Table 2
Measurement scale proprieties.

Constructs and indicators	Standardized loading	Indicator reliability	Error variance
Managers' autonomy (Cronbach alpha = 0.74; CR = 0.74; AVE = 0.59)			
Managers below the top management team can market to new customer segments without approval	0.66	0.44	0.56
Managers below the top management team need no approval to initiate new service development	0.79	0.62	0.38
Managers below the top management team can introduce new practices without approval	0.65	0.42	0.58
Strategic control (Cronbach alpha = 0.77; CR = 0.78; AVE = 0.63)			
Our hotel keeps close track of how well our strategic plan is being carried out	0.75	0.56	0.44
Our hotel regularly conducts performance reviews to determine whether we are likely to achieve the objectives of our strategic plan	0.84	0.71	0.29
Our hotel takes corrective actions based on reported performance measures	0.61	0.37	0.63
Organizational politics (Cronbach alpha = 0.94; CR = 0.94; AVE = 0.75)			
Allocating resources	0.74	0.54	0.46
Making decisions	0.84	0.70	0.30
Hiring and firing employees	0.86	0.74	0.26
Rewarding people/departments	0.94	0.89	0.11
Overall	0.94	0.89	0.11
Strategic planning effectiveness (Cronbach alpha = 0.85; CR = 0.85; AVE = 0.49)			
Developing a clear vision for the hotel	0.71	0.50	0.50
Orienting the hotel toward a unified mission	0.82	0.67	0.33
Defining clear priorities and focusing on the important issues.	0.67	0.44	0.56
Achieving a good fit between the external environment and the internal capabilities of our hotel	0.78	0.61	0.39
Delivering high-quality services	0.59	0.35	0.65
Improving hotel performance	0.61	0.38	0.62

measures we took to mitigate common method variance, memory failure and distortion problems.

4. Data analysis and results

Table 4 demonstrates descriptive statistics and does not suggest multicollinearity problems since all correlation coefficients are comfortably lower than 0.50. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to code and analyze the data employing the two-stage modeling process (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In this process, we first test a confirmatory measurement model in order to assess the adequacy of the individual items and the composites by measures of reliability, validity and the model's goodness-of-fit. Next, SEM was used to test the structural model. To test how well the data fit the measurement and structural models, the traditional goodness-of-fit indices were used, specifically, the incremental fit index (IFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), and the comparative fit index (CFI). Values of the above fit indices range from zero to 1.00 with a value close to 1.00 indicating a good fit (Byrne, 2010). Other fit indices were also selected to assess the fit of the models. These are the chi-square (χ^2), root square mean of approximation (RMSEA) and associated confidence interval, PCLOSE (testing the null hypothesis that RMSEA is no greater than 0.05), and standardized root mean

square residual (SRMR) (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The rest of this section is organized as follows. In Section 4.1, we run exploratory factor analysis and test the full measurement model. Section 4.2 presents the results of structural model and hypotheses testing.

4.1. Measurement model

As recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1982), an exploratory factor analysis was run before testing the full measurement model. All items loaded highly on their intended constructs (item loadings range between 0.66 and 0.89). Next, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the resulting scales and verify the validity and unidimensionality of the study measures. Details on the properties of the measures are provided in Table 2.

Construct validity was examined using convergent validity along with discriminant validity. Convergent validity refers to the degree to which the indicators of a specific construct that theoretically should be related are in fact related. It can be assessed by three criteria. These are factor loadings, construct reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009). First, adequate convergent validity for the items was established because all loadings of items on

Table 3
Measures taken to limit research design potential shortcomings.

Potential source of error	Measures taken to alleviate issue
Common method variance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A priori consideration of method's effects was demonstrated through locating the variables included in this study in different places in the larger project, and thus attention was not drawn to our key relationships. • Objective data were used to measure three variables: hotel size, hotel age and chained-brand hotels. • Reliability and validity evidence for the scales used was provided. • Harman's one-factor test of common method bias was performed and shows that the first factor explained less than 30% of the variance in the data. Hence, a substantial amount of common method variance does not appear to be present.
Memory failure and distortion problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents were asked to describe exactly what happened in their respective hotels, not what should have happened. • Hotels which did not have strategic plans were excluded. • Data were collected from managers who got closely involved in the strategic planning process. • Respondents' participation in this study was strictly voluntary • It fostered a sense that participating hotels will get benefits from the study. • Respondents were assured that responses were anonymous and confidential. • As discussed above, the position and tenure of respondents were used to ensure that competent informants completed the survey instrument.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Managers' autonomy	2.96	0.98	1						
2. Strategic control	4.13	0.60	0.03	1					
3. Organizational politics	2.65	1.19	0.31**	-0.32**	1				
4. Strategic planning effectiveness	4.38	0.48	0.04	0.21**	-0.19*	1			
5. Hotel size	5.18	0.61	-0.03	0.23**	-0.20**	0.19*	1		
6. Hotel age	10.06	8.46	-0.05	-0.05	0.12	-0.02	0.09	1	
7. Chained brand-hotel	0.82	0.39	0.09	0.06	-0.09	0.11	0.25**	0.04	1

Note: N = 175, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

their respective constructs are highly significant ($p < 0.01$), and with one slight exception (0.59), standardized loadings of the items were substantially greater than 0.60 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Second, similar to Cronbach alpha coefficients, all composite reliabilities (CR) are well above the cut-off level of 0.70, confirming a satisfactory degree of internal consistency (see Table 2). Examining the patterns of item/item correlations and item/total correlations showed that there were no deviations from internal and external consistency (Kibbeling, van der Bij, & van Weele, 2013). Third, the AVE, in Table 2, is well above the recommended value of 0.50 with one minor deviation (strategic planning effectiveness, AVE = 0.49), which shows the convergent validity of the study constructs (Hair et al., 2009).

Discriminant validity refers to whether concepts or measurement items that are supposed to be unrelated are, in fact, unrelated. The discriminant validity of the measures was assessed in two ways. First, we checked for correlations between our constructs. Evidence of discriminant validity is deemed present, since correlations between the constructs are relatively low to medium with the highest correlation being 0.32 (Hair et al., 2009). Second, the square root of correlations and AVE were used to assess the discriminant validity of the constructs (Hatcher, 1994). To meet the requirements for satisfactory discriminant validity, the AVE of each construct should be higher than the squared intercorrelations between all sets of constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This indicates that each construct should share more variance with its items than it shares with other constructs. Tables 2 and 4 show that the AVE for the study constructs was greater than any square root of the intercorrelations of the constructs. This implies that the discriminant validity of the four constructs in this study is established.

As shown in Table 5, the results indicate the good fit of the confirmatory measurement model by most indices ($\chi^2 = 193.97$, degrees of freedom [DF] = 107, $\chi^2/DF = 1.81$, IFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.93, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.07, confidence interval [CI] = 0.05–0.08, PCLOSE = 0.03, SRMR = 0.07). Thus, we conclude that the measurement model adequately fit the data, and the testing of the structural model was appropriate.

4.2. Structural model

As presented in Table 5, most goodness-of-fit statistics of the proposed theoretical model are above the recommended threshold values ($\chi^2 = 225.06$, degrees of freedom [DF] = 144, $\chi^2/DF = 1.56$,

IFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.06, confidence interval [CI] = 0.04–0.07, PCLOSE = 0.21, SRMR = 0.07). These results indicate that the proposed hypothesized structural model fits the data well.

The estimated standardized path coefficients for the proposed model are presented in Table 6. It was hypothesized that managers' autonomy positively influences organizational politics. As hypothesized, the path from managers' autonomy ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) to organizational politics was significant and positive which supports Hypothesis 1. We also hypothesized that strategic control negatively influences organizational politics. This hypothesis was also supported. The path from strategic control to organizational politics was negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.01$), which supports Hypothesis 2. Both middle managers' autonomy and strategic control explain 35% of organizational politics. In addition, the findings suggest that the relationship between organizational politics and the effectiveness of strategic planning was statistically significant and negative ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.05$), providing support for Hypothesis 3 that organizational politics have a negative effect on strategic planning effectiveness.

5. Discussion

The academic and practice-oriented literature on strategic management has developed rapidly in parallel with the related strategic management consultancy business literature since the late 1970s (Nixon & Burns, 2012). In sharp contrast to this literature, research on strategic management in general, and organizational politics in the hospitality and tourism industry in particular, still

Table 6
Estimated standardized coefficients for the hypothesized model.

Path from	Path to	
	Organizational politics	Effectiveness of strategic planning
Managers' autonomy	0.41**	0.16
Strategic control	-0.35**	0.03
Organizational politics		-0.26*
Hotel size	-0.12	0.13
Hotel age	0.13	-0.02
Chained brand hotel	-0.09	0.04
R ²	0.35	0.11

Note: N = 175, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

Table 5
Goodness-of-fit Indices of measurement and structural models.

Model	χ^2	DF	χ^2/df	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	(CI)	PCLOSE	SRMR
Criteria			<5	≥0.90	≥0.90	≥0.90	<0.10	0.05–0.08	>0.05	<0.08
Measurement model	193.97	107	1.81	0.95	0.93	0.95	0.07	0.05–0.08	0.03	0.07
Structural model	225.06	144	1.56	0.95	0.94	0.95	0.06	0.04–0.07	0.21	0.07

Note: N = 175.

lags behind (Phillips & Moutinho, 2014). With organizational politics being a ubiquitous feature of strategic decision processes in general (Chakravarthy & White, 2002; Dayan et al., 2012), and strategic planning in particular (Guth & MacMillan, 1986; Lechner & Floyd, 2012), this study is necessary to illustrate the antecedents and outcomes of organizational politics. This study not only provides insights into the role of autonomy and control in organizational politics and the impact of politics on strategic planning performance, which is theoretically underdeveloped in prior research, but also constitutes, to our knowledge, the first large-scale empirical examination of such relationships in the hotel sector. The findings of this study can serve as an important stage in advancing theorizing about the role of organizational politics and similar concepts in the hotel sector. Further, our results have implications for the organizational politics literature, as discussed below.

The analysis of 175 hotels confirms that autonomy and control co-exist as distinct antecedents that influence organizational politics. Although middle managers' autonomy has been discussed in the literature, its role in organizational politics has been given very little attention, which this study aimed to remedy by examining this role. The findings demonstrate that autonomy underpins the emergence of organizational politics. As a result, we conclude that the greater autonomy given to middle managers when making decisions can increase their ability to play politics. Although it is recommended that top management need to give autonomy to middle managers (Ouakouak et al., 2014), this should in each case depend on the situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993). Hence, a major question for future research that emerges from this study is to determine the conditions under which managers' autonomy in decision-making and problem solving is to be considered appropriate and desirable in order to confirm the contingency view of the determinants of positive autonomy. In fact, autonomy requires certain qualities and attributes from managers, such as an awareness of their power, and a capacity for self-regulation along with a feeling of responsibility and a conviction that such power must be used for the benefit of their organizations (Psychogios et al., 2009). In this sense, organizations need to prepare managers to become progressively autonomous (Ouakouak et al., 2014). Autonomy without certain qualities from managers, as individuals, may lead to not appropriately exercising their power (Rees, 1999) and therefore may promote political behavior. Furthermore, if managers are not morally bound by and devoted to their organizations, they may misuse their liberty of action and freedom of personal judgment to harm their organizations (Claydon & Doyle, 1996).

The results of this study lend broad support for our argument that strategic control is effective in mitigating organizational politics. If this is the case, a primary implication of these findings for managerial practice is that a major role for top management is to impose the kind of strategic control that can defuse organizational politics. This further leads to a requirement to enhance strategic control over the actions of managers, in particular those with high levels of autonomy. Organizational control helps to align individual and organizational goals, not least in a context characterized by high levels of politics, or the pursuit of people toward their own goals rather than those of the organization (Kreutzer et al., 2014). Moreover, prior research has indicated the crucial role of control in the management of a wide variety of managerial challenges (Sitkin et al., 2010), such as those concerning political behavior through directing managers' attention towards current strategic objectives. Above all, strategic control helps organizations to make sure that the behaviors and actions of their managers are consistent with the organization's objectives and plans (Malmi & Brown, 2008). For example, the strategic control process provides top management with the information they need to decide how and when to

intervene in the affairs of businesses reported to them. Such interventions may range from discussing simple issues with the responsible manager, through strong pressure for alternative actions and decisions, to the replacement of managers themselves (Goold & Quinn, 1990).

In line with widespread evidence from related research, the results show that organizational politics negatively affect strategic planning effectiveness (Dean & Sharfman, 1996; Elbanna & Child, 2007; Elbanna et al., 2015; Kreutzer et al., 2014).

The above discussion presents two straightforward findings. First, consistent with our speculations, managers' autonomy and strategic control play a significant role in predicting organizational politics. Second, the validity of the findings of previous research suggests that organizational politics negatively influence organizational performance, in particular the effectiveness of strategic planning.

5.1. Implications for managers

A good understanding of political behavior could serve to forestall its harmful manifestations and instead use it to broaden discussion, in the best long-term interests of both people and organizations. For example, although it was argued that top executives should give middle managers more autonomy since it significantly contributes, for example, to developing their capabilities, top executives need to do so carefully because of the possible negative effect of autonomy on other organizational behaviors, such as organizational politics. Developing effective ways of managing autonomy, hence, could be useful for helping managers to take advantage of their autonomy in a way that contributes to the success of the organization rather than promoting politics (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 2000). In other words, autonomy is not simply giving managers the power to be self-directing; rather managers need to be prepared to effectively use autonomy when making decisions. For example, managers who rely on cooperation and the approaches of positive politics and constructive conflict (Alper et al., 2000; Kapoutsis, Elbanna, & Mellahi, 2014) would appear to be good candidates for the gift of autonomy, since it can be made to work effectively for the organization and themselves at the same time (Alper et al., 2000).

This study also has suggestions for research on strategic planning, which emphasizes the monitoring and guiding of strategic plans and their initiatives as among top managers' key responsibilities (Kreutzer et al., 2014). With hotels increasingly relying on strategic planning to explore their future strategic options in an uncertain and complex environment, this study provides practical insights into the importance of strategic control to account for political behavior. These findings should help managers to avoid common drawbacks in the management of organizations and the development of strategic plans, and consequently diminish the high failure rates of these strategic endeavors (Kreutzer et al., 2014). For example, since politics are ubiquitous, senior managers must decide when and how to get involved, either by approving altered objectives or plans, pressing for new ones, or finally changing all managers who are involved in them. In sum, this article highlights key governance elements, for practitioners, which need to be addressed when making important decisions in organizations, in order to reduce the level of organizational politics. These elements are proper use of autonomy and strategic control to neutralize political behavior and consequently reduce its undesirable effects on planning effectiveness.

6. Limitations, future research, and conclusion

In a nutshell, although our findings should be interpreted with

the limitations of this study in mind, they still can offer fruitful opportunities for future research. The limitations are, first, that the data were collected from a single region (i.e. the GCC). Although this was intentional, some caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings of this study to other national settings. A cross-cultural study would resolve this issue. Second, this study reports from each firm the views of a single respondent. It could be said that another executive might have provided different responses and taking the average of their responses could have led to results that were more robust. However, the nature of our data (drawn from the answers to a long questionnaire referring to several variables) and the characteristics of the sample (only a very few people per hotel are in position to complete the questionnaire) made it extremely difficult to draw on the perceptions of more than one respondent per hotel. In such cases, relying on only one respondent per hotel appears to be a viable and reliable research choice. Indeed, the study keeps in line with several previous studies on organizational politics (e.g., [Walter, Kellermanns, & Lechner, 2012](#)). Third, our research design is cross-sectional (measuring dependent and independent variables at the same point in time). This raises issues as to whether there is a causal relationship between the examined variables. Hence, real-time studies would offer additional insights regarding the antecedents and outcomes of organizational politics.

Fourth, the few variables incorporated in this study may not reveal the real complexity of the problem under analysis and therefore they may be integrated into more integrative models of organizational politics including psychological, sociological, and situational variables in order to capture the level of complexity and variety of the relationships under investigation (see for example, [Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997](#)). Fifth, although certain measures were taken to increase the accuracy of the respondents' responses, as discussed above, there is still the potential for social desirability biases in the responses.

Sixth, the AVE of strategic planning effectiveness (0.49) is slightly below the acceptable limit of 0.50 and the RMSEA of the measurement model (0.03) is below the acceptable limit of 0.05. Considering the fact that the above deviations are minor, this study covers an under-researched topic and the results in [Table 5](#) indicate the good fit of both measurement and structural models by most indices, we trust that these slight deviations do not seriously affect the study results and our measures still enjoy a satisfactory degree of both reliability and validity. Seventh, scale anchors were not reversed in any place in the study survey which should be considered by future research in order to check the accuracy of respondents' answers and reduce the common method bias.

Our theorizing and findings on strategic control, autonomy, politics and planning performance also have important implications for future research. First, citing [Kober, Ng, and Paul \(2007\)](#), future research can examine the interrelationship between mechanisms of strategic control system and strategy content/processes. The traditional view is that the strategic control system is shaped by strategy. More recent viewpoints, however, suggest that there may be a two-way relationship between the two variables. That is, strategic control influences on, and is affected by, strategy process. Such relationships need a retrospective longitudinal study, spanning several years and involving different data collection methods, e.g., archival data, interviews, observations and questionnaires. Second, recent reviews and empirical research of the field have suggested the conceptualization of organizational politics be reconsidered to reflect their constructive aspects, offering yet another avenue for future research ([Gavetti, Greve, Levinthal, & Ocasio, 2012](#); [Kapoutsis et al., 2014](#); [Kreutzer et al., 2014](#)). In this view, organizational politics are not necessarily negative as it was argued in this article, but can play constructive roles in organizations ([Kapoutsis et al., 2014](#)). Third, future research needs to

consider what kinds of control it addresses, e.g., organizational, management, strategic, accounting, behavior or outcome controls ([Malmi & Brown, 2008](#)). This can help to understand how controls combine and complement each other and their applicability to different contexts ([Kreutzer et al., 2014](#)). Fourth, two general views on politics are presented in this article – the autonomy view and the control view. The debate on autonomy and control may center on two issues: first, on the question of whether these two are substitutes or independent; and second on their links with organizational politics. Our framework examines the latter only and hence the debate between the independent or substitutional nature of autonomy and control, and the ideal balance of these views can be a subject of future research. Scholars, for example, can explore theories about the optimal balance between control and trust (e.g., [Della Corte & Aria, 2014](#); [de Man & Roijakkers, 2009](#)).

To conclude our study, the analysis confirms that organizational politics are expected to be rarer in low autonomous and high control situations and that organizational politics have detrimental effects on effectiveness of strategic planning. The above results represent key issues not yet well understood in the theoretical literature of organizational politics, in the hospitality and tourism industry in particular, which can provide managerial and theoretical insights into ways of improving performance of hotel companies. Further, our discussion concerning autonomy and control highlights the paradox at the core of strategic management thinking regarding their competitive demands and outcomes which needs further attention from future research.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.06.025>.

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