

## An Overview of the Nature and Extent of Organisational Politics at the National Electricity Provider in a Southern African Development Community Country (SADC)<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** This paper provides an overview of the nature and extent of organizational politics at the National Electricity Provider in a Southern African Development Community country (SADC) with particular focus on the main players within the political environment, taking cognizance of the biographical profiles of the employees from the survey. The major role players within the political environment include the government, board of directors, employees and managers. The methodology for the paper was basically qualitative in nature. Literature from various researchers on organizational politics was researched. Central to the political environment is the issue of common goals and the intent of all players to achieve their goals. It is clear from the literature that organizational politics is predominantly physical at the National Electricity Provider and has huge implications for the normal functioning of the provider.

### INTRODUCTION

The national electricity providers in the SADC region have struggled to power their respective economies for almost two decades without any significant improvement. The intensity of the power crises differs from country to country with Zimbabwe experiencing the worst crisis since attaining independence from Britain in the 1980s (Kaseke and Hosking 2010: 4). The fact that national electricity providers are state-owned entities suggests that the respective governments have some influence in one way or the other in the manner in which national electricity providers are run. For a country such as Zimbabwe, the power generation crisis obviously cannot be separated from the political turmoil that led it to be regarded as a failed state, characterised by maladministration, corruption, civil unrest and poor governance structures across all sectors. According to Kawadza (2013: 3), several power projects which Zimbabwe has just commissioned, that includes the massive Batoka

power plant, leave everyone in doubt on whether the project will succeed or not since the country has been in budgetary distress over the years. And yet the point is, “organisational politics” has become worse and rife, continuously eroding the potential of the power utility to focus on its core business of generating the much needed power for the economy.

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The prevalence of organisational politics in organisations in particular at the national electricity provider is an unavoidable development for the simple reason that, organisations is by nature political arenas where battles are fought, won or lost (Gotsis and Kortezi 2011: 450). The political activity becomes even more concentrated in national electricity providers due to government influence as national electricity providers are state controlled as a constitutional mandate. In the process of such political battles, the functioning of the organisation is either positively or negatively affected. Whenever people gather to accomplish a common purpose, there is bound to be organisational politics, concurs Veluri (2009: 5). It is therefore critical for managers to establish the nature and extent of organisational politics so as to fully understand the political environment in which they operate. Understanding the nature and extent of the political environment at the early stages equips managers with the right tools to handle the political pressure whenever it works against the normal organisational managerial practices. This paper is triggered by the current state of affairs in most of the Southern African national electricity providers which have had a fair share of organisational politics related challenges over the past two decades, exacerbated by the inability to generate adequate electrical power for the respective economies on the part of the national utility provider. The increasing levels of organisational politics at most of the national electricity providers in SADC are therefore cause for concern, culminating into power politics, fighting for positions, the struggle for resources and promotion, backstabbing, image tarnishing, blaming others, suspension from employment, unlawful termination of employment contracts as well as whistleblowing just to mention a few. In most instances, there are numerous media reports of tensions amongst employees within the national electricity providers where most of the politicking identified previously is prevalent. Failure to handle such challenges on the part of management often degenerates into heated debates that tend to affect the smooth flow of operations as evidenced by the resignation of

South Africa’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the national electricity provider (Eskom) following an altercation with the chairman of the Board (Engineeringnews 2012). News of the CEO’s resignation sparked the whole country, raising doubts about the power utility ability to handle organisational politics related challenges while at the same time forging ahead in generating the much needed electrical power for Africa’s biggest economy.

Zimbabwe generates only 1,300 MW of electricity against a daily consumption of 2,200 megawatts, falling short by 900 megawatts. To cover the gap the country has been importing power from neighbouring countries but most of these countries have since cut off supply due to non-payment (Kawadza 2013: 3). According to Mangoma (cited by Muleya 2005) the national electricity provider of Zimbabwe is owed US 550 million by customers of which huge sums are owed by some high profile government ministers making the debt recovery process all the more difficult as the ministers often use government political power to stop possible disconnections of power.

The electricity situation in Zimbabwe has reached alarming levels that are unimaginable. For example, the shortages have forced the national electricity provider to ration supplies to both domestic and commercial users with most areas going for 10 hours per day without electrical power (Mananavire 2012: 6). Load shedding has dented the once strong and vibrant economy of Southern Africa due to the electrical power generation crises (Mtomba 2012). This has hampered the provision of critical services such as conducting medical surgeries/operation. Many lives have been lost as medical doctors find it impossible to conduct medical operations using diesel electrical generators to power their operating equipment (Own Correspondent 2012). The national electricity supply has been struggling to power the economy for close to two decades without any sign of improvement and there is no hope of improvement in the near future as echoed by Zimbabwe’s Minister of Energy, Mangoma, as he lamented that load shedding was bound to worsen in 2012 and beyond, citing the awarding of hefty allowances and salaries to senior employees as a grave organisational political mistake for an already resource stricken company (Own Correspondent 2012). To add salt to an injury, negative organisational

politics have become rife. Boardroom squabbles have become the order of the day and unbearable. The political battles between the board of directors and the general manager of the biggest power station have been predicted as influencing unproductive tendencies at the national electricity provider (Muleya 2005). For example, the boardroom squabbles resulted in the general manager's suspension instead of politically engaging to breed a more productive organisation, a more ignited environment that fosters growth and productivity. Butcher and Clarke (cited by Gotsis and Kortezi 2011: 454) argue that organisational politics motivates the workforce in redefining the patterns of activity for organisational benefit. In support of this view, Butcher and Clarke (2008: 10) posit that organisational politics influences employee motivation that results in the overall improvement of organisational productivity. The presence of organisational politics voluntarily compels the role-players to work together in a politicised environment for a better future. In line with this school of thought, managers, employees, government and the national electricity provider can take advantage of the politicised work environment to ignite a productive atmosphere. The paper, therefore seeks to identify and measure employee perceptions of organisational politics at the national electricity provider with an ultimate aim of harnessing dysfunctional politics towards a productive organisation.

The argument is, if the valuable time and effort spent on resolving matters related to power politics, resource distribution, promotions, backstabbing, favouritism, unnecessary termination of employment and suspension from employment pending investigations, is directed towards finding new ways of improving the power generation capacity, probably, Southern African national electricity providers would not be in such a critical power generation crisis. There could be other causative factors to the power generation crisis such as under capitalisation due to poor planning, lack of organisational and leadership skills, shortage of specific trade skills such as engineers and fitters, and inadequate resources. However, following the increasing publicity of organisational politics in national and private media ahead of the other factors leaves organisational politics as prime suspect to the current electrical power generation crisis that is affecting most Southern African states (Engineeringnews 2009).

### **Problem Statement**

The national electricity provider is a massive organisation by Zimbabwean standards which employs approximately 6500 employees with an operating budget of US\$ 72 million in the 2012 fiscal year (ZESA 2013). The newly formed government of Zimbabwe took over the management of the national electricity provider from the then government of the colonial ruler in 1980 inheriting some fair amount of electricity power challenges which were not as intense as they are at the present period. For the ten years while under the control of the newly formed democratic government of Zimbabwe from the 1980s to the 1990s, the national electricity provider managed a rather steady supply of electricity up to the 1990s and since then, Zimbabwe has been reeling with unending load shedding challenges that has negatively affected the overall performance of the economy at large.

The power crisis facing Zimbabwe is largely influenced by the main role-players in the political systems of the national electricity provider which include the government, the board of directors, the employees and the managers of different portfolios within the organisation. It is critical to note that the national electricity provider's political environment is largely dominated by the government as a constitutional obligation with the CEO serving as the link between the national electricity provider and the government (Zhou 2012: 152-161). It is also paramount to note that the government's involvement marks the beginning of the organisational political process since the government has to influence the developments at the national electricity provider through treasury instructions, policies, rules and regulations. Further, employees of the national electricity provider play a significant role in the political environment since they provide the labour. According to Muleya (2005), boardroom squabbles that resulted in the suspension of the general managers was predicted as partly causing the current power outages. As if this is not enough, the national electricity provider continues to deny workers their rights to participate or air their views in the way the organisation is being or should be managed. The most critical point of significance is that Zimbabwe is not the usual Zimbabwe of the 1980s to 1990s. Zimbabwe has dramatically changed politically, economically and socially from good

governance to being a failed state characterised by dysfunctional state structures, bankruptcy and corruption complicating the overburdened political environment (Asuelime and Simura 2013: 55). The paper, therefore seeks to explore the nature and extent of organisational politics at the national electricity providers in Southern Africa.

### Objectives

The primary objective of the paper is to develop a conceptual model to manage organisational politics.

The secondary objectives are:

- ♦ to identify the main role-players and their roles in the political system of the national electricity provider from secondary sources;
- ♦ explore the political environment at the national electricity provider from secondary sources; and to
- ♦ Determine the demographical profile of the national electricity provider in an empirical study.

### Literature Review:

#### Defining Organisational Politics

Most people in the workplace agree that organisational politics is a reality of organisational life. Politicking is one of the options for those who wish to influence decisions (June 2003: 138) and it is common to find organisational members engaging in influence attempts, such as ingratiation, impression management and developing power coalitions just to name a few, so as to protect or further their own interests, particularly if their workplace is characterised by uncertainty, limited resources, favouritism and lack of trust. The national electricity provider of Zimbabwe is no exception to these organisational political developments. As a state controlled organisation, the relevant ministry, through the relevant department, appoints a board of directors that oversees the entire running of the organisation. Thus, through policy directives such as treasury instructions, rules, regulations and annual budget processes, government becomes a major player in the national electricity organisational political processes.

In order for one to understand the nature and extent of politics at the national electricity

provider, it is pertinent that one has a working definition of the concept “organisational politics”. There are varying definitions of organisational politics with varying perspectives of what it entails. For a better comprehension of the concept, defining the two terms “organisation” and “politics” separately makes one’s understanding of organisational politics a lot simpler.

According to Veluri (2009: 2), an organisation is a group of individuals, who come together to realize their goals. Aryee and Budhwar (2004: 2), and Othman (2010: 43) define an organisation as a social marketplace where individuals engage in transactions to obtain favourable returns. George and Jones (2011: 5) seem to agree with the above definitions. They define an organisation as a collection of people who work together and coordinate their actions to achieve desired future outcomes. The national electricity provider is thus, an organisation with employees, managers and structures for carrying out their day-to-day work but who also have individual ambitions of achieving their own goals.

According to George and Jones (2011: 5), managers are responsible for supervising and making the most of organisations’ human and other resources to achieve its goals. It is therefore important to note that human beings are born in organisations, educated by organisations and to acknowledge that they do spend most of their lives working in organisations. Even the families, in which they spend most of their time in, are also an organisation. Hence an organisation is a group of individuals who agree to share their effort in the realisation of common goals. Robbins and Judge (2012: 38) identify organisations to be characterized by a distinct purpose, multiple members and a systematic structure. Organisations have emerged and exist primarily because they are more efficient than individuals operating individually and therefore can produce items and/or provide services which an individual could not produce/provide alone. In so doing the organisation is able to meet the needs and demands of current day society through:

- ♦ Bringing together resources that are necessary for production,
- ♦ Provide the products and services which the society needs; and
- ♦ Creating and providing career opportunities for members of the society.



The goals of an organisation are therefore derived from individual goals. Horton (2010: 112) posits that an organisation is not merely a rational model of economic activity but rather a place where political activity and conflict takes place. The constraints of bounded rationality and imperfect information limit the ability of organisations to develop a complete set of rules and procedures to guide and govern employees and management's actions and behaviour within an organisation setting. In order to meet the needs and demands of current day society, organisations establish goals which need to be operationalised for the purpose of the organisation to be achieved (Smit et al. 2011: 18). Management serves to ensure that such goals are established and operationalised, and in so doing supports the purpose of the organisation.

The national electricity provider squarely fits into the above description and definition of an organisation in that, it consists of people (employees, managers and board of directors) who deliberately agree to share ideas in order to realise a common goal as well as achieving individual goals. The common goal of the national electricity provider is to generate electricity for the entire economy while the individual goals of the workers are mainly focused on achieving individual personal expectations such as high salaries, driving latest car models, as well as receiving the best fringe benefit package. The aspirations of individuals in achieving the goal to earn a living normally boil down to pertinent matters that lead to a politically poised environment termed organisational politics which this paper seeks to unpack.

The term 'politics' has many negative connotations; various academicians agree that managers who are 'political' utilise their power for self-interest purposes and not for the benefit of the organisation (George and Jones 2011). Politics can be viewed as the management and decision-making processes of social groups (Ullah et al. 2011: 37). It is therefore important to note that politics means the influence process enacted to manage the multiple competing interests existing in organisations (Ullah et al. 2011: 37). However, while organisational politics can certainly lead to the misuse and abuse of power, organisational politics can also be a positive force within an organisation. According to George and Jones (2011), effective managers engage in politics to gain support for and imple-

ment needed changes, and engaging in organisational politics can help managers overcome resistance and achieve organisational goals thereby ultimately enhancing organisational performance. From another angle, political behaviour may represent a threat to overall organisational efficiency and effectiveness. According to Robbins and Judge (2012: 199), politics refers to a situation when individual employees in the organisation convert their power into action. Political behaviour in organisations consists of activities that are not required as part of an individual's formal role but that influence, or attempt to influence the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organisation (Robbins and Judge 2012: 199). Robbins and Judge (2009: 358) analyse the definition as encompassing key elements of what most people mean when they refer to organisational politics. Thus, political behaviour is outside one's specified job requirements.

Organisational politics involves managers and employees within the organisation engaging in activities which serve to increase their power, as well as activities which involve the use of power to overcome opposing parties (George and Jones 2011: 230). In recent decades, organisational politics has become a growing field of interest in management studies. It refers to the activities that managers and other members of the organisation engage in for increasing and using their power effectively so as to achieve their goals and overcome resistance or opposition (George and Jones 2011: 614). The inclusion of "other members" in this definition suggests everyone else in the organisation as well as management can be involved in organisational politics, and this includes the employees as well.

According to Moorhead and Griffin (2009), organisational politics refers to the activities carried out by people to acquire, enhance, and use power and other resources to obtain their desired outcomes. Robbins and Judge (2012: 374) concur with the aforementioned sentiments when they say that whenever people get together in groups, power will be exerted. They emphasise that people want to carve out a niche from which to exert influence, to earn rewards, and to advance their careers; and when employees in the organisation convert their power into action, they are then described as being engaged in politics. According to George and Jones (2011: 450), or-

organisational politics is a multifaceted construct; most often conceived as inherently self-serving activity that is intended to enhance or secure self-interest, either at individual or group level. It consists of intentional acts of influence, mainly informally exercised, as well as intentional use and exercise of power so as to gain access to scarce resources, and of actions and tactics aiming at influencing decision-making (Fleming and Spencer 2008). Organisational politics can also be viewed as an exercise of power and influence that primarily occurs outside of formal organisational processes and procedures (Kurchner-Hawkins and Miller 2006) as cited by Ullah et al. (2011: 37). Thus, political behaviour can be considered as “influence tactics meant to perpetuate self and/or organisational interests”, and its basic aim is to reconcile and effectively manage such potentially competing interests (Ullah et al. 2011: 37).

From the aforementioned assertions, it is clear that organisations are deliberately created and maintained by people who have different goals and ambitions. The inherent selfish nature of human beings makes them compete in order to realise their individual goals, thus overlooking or even undermining the goals of others. In order to overcome this, organisations develop common goals that reflect the individual interests of its members. Despite the development of such common goals, some members will always try to meet their selfish ends; thus, individuals often find themselves having to rely on informal and unsanctioned means in making decisions, thereby marking the beginnings/foundations of organisational politics. It is therefore clear that both informal and unsanctioned means of decision-making within the organisation present perpetrators of organisational politics with the opportunity to engage in political behaviour. The high level political tempo in organisations is manifested by the differences in the positions held by the employees. Differences in positions between managers and employees obviously compound the perceived view of organisational politics. Those placed in management positions always thrive to take advantage of the power vested in them in making decisions to their favour, with employees on the receiving end. The concept of organisational politics is therefore closely related to power in the organisational setting, thus, political behaviour is the general means by which people attempt to ob-

tain and use power. Put simply, the goal of such behaviour is to get one’s own way about things.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed makes use of both secondary research and primary research. Objectives 1 (identifying the main role-players) and Objective 2 (exploring the political environment) are served by a literature review of secondary sources. Objective 3 (biographical profile) is serviced by collecting primary data – thus an empirical study. To do so, a questionnaire was designed and distributed to sample of 1400 randomly identified employees National Electricity Provider. The sample was drawn from a population of 2210 at the head office quarters of the National Electricity Provider. A total of 337 completed questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 24.07%. This data were employed to compile the biographical profiles of the employees of the National Electricity Provider.

## RESULTS

### **The Main Players and Their Role in Political System at the National Electricity Provider**

As explained in the proceeding sections, all National Electricity Providers in Southern Africa are state controlled and so does the National Electricity Provider of Zimbabwe. Figure 1 shows the main players in the political systems at the National Electricity Provider.

#### *The Government*

At the heart of any public sector lies the central government which is represented by the various ministries and government departments. According to Minnaar and Bekker (2005: 57), government is regarded as the macro-function of making policies in terms of the legislative process. The national electricity provider falls under the ministry of energy resources headed by the minister who has executive control over its management. The minister, through the permanent secretary, makes decisions, formulates policies, rules and regulations that guide the chief executive officer (CEO) and the board of directors on how to manage the organisation. According to Zhou (2012: 152-161) the modern

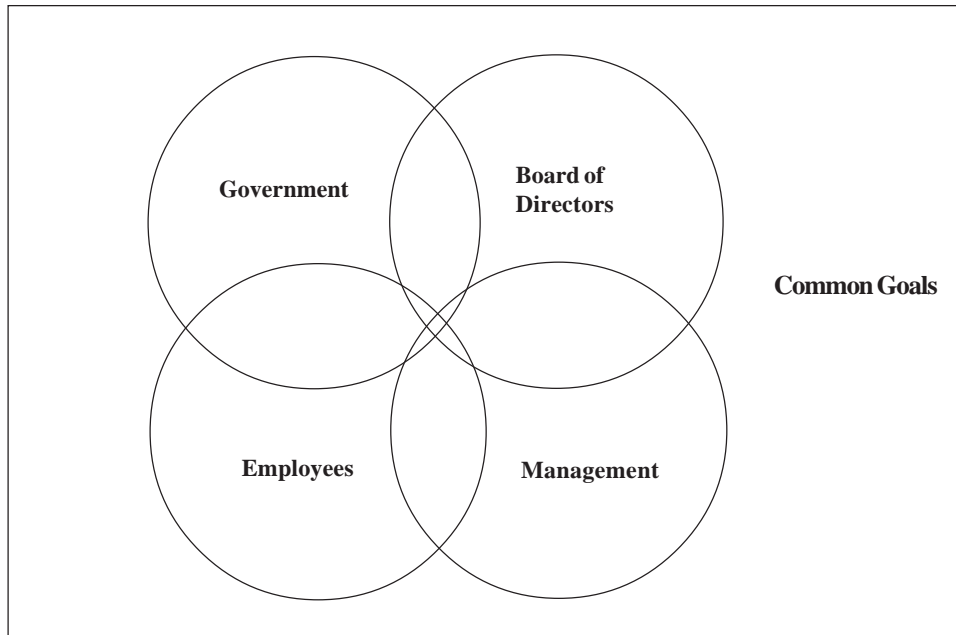


Fig. 1. Role-players in Zesa political environmen

government is run democratically, meaning that all the views from all sections of society within a democratic state are considered in the policy formulation process prior to implementation. Asuelime and Simura (2013: 51-65) share the same view when they emphasise that the modern government has shifted from the old approach of dictatorship, where the presidency makes unilateral decisions without any form of consultations. The most critical role of government is dependent upon government power. In a democratic state, government power is vested in the electorate, who elect members of parliament to govern and make laws on their behalf.

Unfortunately Zimbabwe has become an abnormal different unique SADC country that has been experiencing governance related challenges emanating from the poor governance structures and decisions that have been worsened by dictatorship, corruption, maladministration, cronyism and theft (Kaseke and Hosking 2011: 3). In brief, the government of Zimbabwe has been dysfunctional for two decades without any sign of improvement, to the extent that it would be impossible for the national electricity provider to get any meaningful support from a failed government.

The electricity challenges for Zimbabwe could be as simple as making a ministerial decision to explore and implement the various natural resources available. For example, Zimbabwe is endowed with vast natural energy resources that include, gas, coal, 9 hours of broad daylight which is a potential for solar energy and the several steep gorges along the Zambezi River which can be tapped into hydro-power. Unfortunately none of these have been progressively explored on time to bridge the electricity crisis (Kawadza 2013: 3). Clearly, it can be concluded, that government can make or destroy its public corporations. Even the inadequate funding that the government is experiencing could have been resolved by the discovery of the diamonds. Unfortunately, no funding has yet reached the fiscus, an indication of how corruption has become a cancer in the Zimbabwean mining structures (Theworldbank 2012). Most of Zimbabwe's state institutions at the time of study are in a chaotic financial and operational state, offering mediocre performance with all the blame levelled against the inadequate support from the present government (Zondi and Mlaudzi 2010: 40).

The National Electricity Provider is a state owned institution that falls under the ministry of energy. The minister of energy, through the

permanent secretary, formulates the policies, rules and regulations that guide the chief executive officer (CEO) and board of directors of the National Electricity Provider on how to run the institution.

### *The Board of Directors*

The Auditor-General for Australia, Pat Barrett (cited by Minnaar and Bekker 2005: 62), viewed the board of directors as a group of senior management, mostly at director level responsible for providing strategic guidance, how the organisation is managed, how its corporate and the various structures are arranged, its culture, policies and strategies.

Corporate governance refers to the process and structure used to direct and manage the business affairs of the company towards enhancing business prosperity and corporate accountability with the ultimate objective of realizing long term shareholder value whilst taking into account the interest of the stakeholders (Keasey 1997; Abor and Biekpe 2007: 288). A corporate governance system, then, is the system of monitoring devices, internal and external, specific to the organization, which defines how these mechanisms are set up and how each fulfills its monitoring role (Pergola and Joseph 2011: 2000). It is therefore critical to note that the governance system is specific to each company, and that the different ownership structures may result in different structures, cultures and outcomes based on their unique governance objectives.

For the National Electricity Provider, the board of directors refers to the individuals appointed by the minister of energy, entrusted with the responsibility of managing the organization. At the National Electricity Provider, corporate governance seeks to ensure continuous generation of adequate electrical power. The Board of Directors acts as agents of the owners, and in the case of the National Electricity Providers, the owners are the government. Government is therefore being held increasingly responsible for controlling the actions of senior management and for evaluating and implementing effective system (Pergola and Joseph 2011: 2000). The board of directors, through its chairperson, is mandated to provide strategic directions in line with ministerial policy statements. According to Robert et al. (2000), the board of directors is appointed to act on behalf of the shareholders to

run the day to day affairs of the business. The board members are directly accountable to the shareholders and each year the company will hold an annual general meeting (AGM) at which the directors must provide a report to shareholders on the performance of the company, what its future plans and strategies are and also submit themselves for re-election to the board.

Robert et al. (2010: 1) provide the following as typical duties of boards of directors:

1. Governing the organization by establishing board policies and objectives;
2. Selecting, appointing, supporting and reviewing the performance of the chief executive;
3. Ensuring the availability of adequate financial resources;
4. Approving annual budgets;
5. Accounting to the stakeholders for the organization's performance and
6. Setting the salaries and compensation of company management.

A development where the board of directors spends most of the time trying to harness boardroom squabbles at the expense of positive engagement, as the case at the National Electricity Provider is unfortunate as eluded by Muleya (2005), when he said that the boardroom fights and gross incompetence were partly responsible for the current power outages by the National Electricity Provider which has the capacity to generate enough electricity for the country.

### *Managers*

For any organisation to be successful there has to be a functional management team operating under an ideal management structure that operates in a conducive organisational work environment at different levels of management. According to Minnaar and Bekker (2005: 22), a management environment refers to the total surroundings of the organisation both tangible and intangible which directly or indirectly impact on what the organisation is supposed to do and determines its ability to do it. The environment can be divided into two broad categories namely the internal and external environment. While the internal environment consists of the things that happen within the organisation such as the working relations, the rules and regulations, policies, the management support systems, the



procedures, processes and organisational culture which management has control of, the external environment refers to the outside factors affecting the organisation which managers may not directly have control of which include, the community, the suppliers, regulators, inflation and the political situation in a country (Du Toit et al. 2010: 104). The complexity brought by the two environments obviously impact on the manner in which managers at the national electricity provider discharge their day-to-day roles and functions. The relationship that exists between managers and their subordinates as well as super ordinates, the communication channels and systems, the organisational and the bureaucracy that is endemic in public institutions is bound to affect management roles and functions. The fact that the national electricity provider is a state organisation that is largely controlled by government implies a heavy dependency on bureaucratic tendencies and structures from the lowest employee to the CEO and to the minister of energy. According to Minnaar and Bekker (2005: 11), bureaucracy, as an organisational system is by definition unable to respond and provide value in a contemporary world such as the one in which the national electricity provider operates. In support, Du Toit et al. (2010: 104), emphasises that it is time public organisations move away from the bureaucratic approach of management where rigidity and red tape are the order of the day. This is a common characteristic at the national electricity provider, however, proponents of bureaucracy, still view it as a means of providing some internal checks and balances within an organisation's structures and systems, hence its heavy presence in public sector organisations such as the national electricity provider.

The national electricity provider focusses mainly on the three levels of management that includes top management, middle management and first line managers. Communication amongst all managers is a two-way process and can be vertical and/or horizontal. The lines of authority and communication represent the bureaucratic processes within the organisation resulting in red tape which is usually associated with public administration. Authority comes from the top management down to the lowest levels of management. The communication processes and the delegation of authority and responsibility by senior managers to lower level managers and the organisation at large signify a political pro-

cess in its own right, notwithstanding the involvement of the minister.

Below first-line managers would be the various grades of employees who do not hold management positions such as clerks, electricians, drivers, mechanics, secretaries and several others. Such levels are excluded from the above chart as they do not represent management levels, but nevertheless they are part and parcel of the national electricity provider's workforce. The following is a discussion of the various levels of management within the electricity provider.

- ♦ *Top Management:* Top management is entirely the overseer of the organisation and the incumbent appointed to the position is usually called the CEO. The CEO, board of directors and directors constitute the top management of the national electricity provider. The CEO has overall responsibility of the national electricity provider. He/she determines the overall vision, mission, goals, objectives and strategy to achieve the goals of the organisation. To successfully discharge his/her mandate the CEO creates and establishes the organisational structure and then monitors the overall performance of the organisation through the chain of command, lines of communication, and reporting structures depicted by the organogram (George and Jones 2011: 3). Top management represents the small group of managers who control the organisation, and who have final authority and responsibility for executing the management function at the national electricity provider. Du Toit et al. (2010: 470) adds that top management have overall responsibility for the organisation by providing the strategic guidance. The chain of command from the CEO, to the minister depicts some levels of bureaucracy at the national electricity provider. The main functions of the CEO are purely the provision of strategic guidance and leadership roles. While the CEO enjoys autonomy, there are obviously some challenges bedevilling the work of the CEO and chief among them are the political forces from the government and within the organisation itself. From the government side, political control in the form of ministerial directives represents a form of politicking in the affairs of the organisation while intra-personal relationship amongst employees, the struggle for positions and resource allo-

cation constitute a host of political challenges that can affect the decision-making process. According to Hansen et al. (2012: 31), CEO managerial autonomy, good as it may be, is affected by the split between policy and operations. The split comes in the sense that the central government formulates policy statements that are cascaded to the CEO for implementation. Such a gap obviously leads to structural disintegration that has a potential to negatively affect the smooth flow of work (Bozeman and Feeney 2009: 140). The relationship between the CEO and the minister is a constitutional obligation that needs to be respected especially by the CEO as subordinate to the minister. The CEO has to seek approval before implementing significant decisions. For example, decisions to embark on massive energy projects definitely will not kick-start without the minister's approval. Therefore, the bureaucratic link between the national electricity provider and the parent energy ministry obviously affects the CEO's role and functions with a potential to make or destroy the organisation's management and administrative structures.

- ♦ *Middle Management*: is responsible for specific functions/departments within the organisation, and is primarily concerned with implementing policies, plans and strategies from top management. Middle management is concerned with medium-term and short-term planning, organising, functional areas, leading by means of departmental heads, and controlling the management activities of the middle manager's own departments. Middle managers are a necessary link between the upper and lower levels of the organisation. Examples of middle level managers at the national electricity provider would be the human, finance, operation, technical and operation managers. At the national electricity provider, examples of such middle levels managers include the distribution, human resources finance, operations, marketing and technical division managers.
- ♦ *First-line Management*: often referred to as supervisory management and takes responsibility for the day-to-day operations of a particular section within a department or division (Jones et al. 2009). For the national electricity provider all the officers shown on the level one which include the human re-

sources, finance, operations, technical, and distribution represent the first-line managers.

The three levels of management, as explained, are not by default, they play a major role in the day-to-day management of the organisation. The link between the various positions is made possible by establishing the reporting lines, determining how authority is distributed among positions (Du Toit et al. 2010: 202). Managers, however, cannot perform all the tasks within the organisation alone; hence they have to work through delegated responsibility and the decentralisation of power. Power politics represent a formidable form of organisational politics and is usually the strongest tool a manager can use in order to command respect (Minnaar and Bekker 2005: 11). And in an organisation such as the national electricity provider, the use of power by the various managers cannot be underestimated. It is important to note that every manager has some form of power which can be applied in varying degrees and circumstances in pursuit of achieving the goals of the organisation. The bolded lines indicated on the organogram depicts lines of communication and authority taking a top down approach.

Management refers to "the planning, organising, leading and controlling of resources to achieve organisational goals effectively and efficiently" (George and Jones 2011: 5). Management's task is argued the one responsible for examining factors, methods and principles that enable a business organisation to maximise its profits and achieve its objectives (Smit et al. 2011: 8). The achievement of this task is reliant on the management process, which comprises the functions of planning, organising, leading and controlling. The above definitions highlight different aspects of management. If the above definitions are combined a consolidated definition of management may be formulated: Management is therefore a discipline, a practice and a process which involves working with and through people. It involves planning, leading, organising and controlling of both human and other resources so as to achieve organisational goals efficiently, effectively and ethically.

The national electricity provider's management has been found wanting on several occasions, for example, they have been on record for awarding themselves hefty salaries and allowance (Sibanda 2012) against the background of

mediocre performance characteristic of below capacity generation of electricity resulting in electrical power blackouts that have adversely affected the entire industry ultimately pushing down the country's GDP figures to the lowest ever.

### *Employees*

Employees in an organisation can be viewed from the biographical angle that includes age composition, level of experience, gender, level of education as well as position in the organisation. The biographical composition plays a key role in the contribution the employees make towards the organisation's success. Thus, employers keep a record of the demographics of their employees for various reasons. It is interesting to note that for an organisation which is largely heterogeneous as is the case of the national electricity provider, there is bound to be group and team formation following the pattern of the various age groups. In a study on employee diversity by Kunze et al. (2011: 2), employees were found to establish groups and teams that include members within the same age range and that more elderly workers showed high commitment to the organisation despite approaching retirement age. Rowold (2010: 630) gives support to this by noting that employees who are in the same age group usually team up with the middle age range demonstrating to be more resourceful than the other groups, while those reaching retirement demonstrate high commitment to the organisation.

Thomas and Feldman (2009: 90-95) wrote extensively on employee education, experience and performance. According to Thomas and Feldman, most organisations use education as an indicator of detecting the "person skill". Jalbert et al. (2011: 16-19) stated that employee skill is linked to the education and experience that one has. The national electricity provider's recruitment processes stipulates clearly the respective education requirements for each and every position. The above authors summarily agree to the point that the performance and skill of an employee is related to his or her education. It is also important to note that workforce diversity includes gender variables (male and female employees). In the contemporary organisation, with affirmative action being considered through increasing the number of women, particularly ap-

pointing women on key positions is considered a welcome development. Of note, Thomas and Feldman (2009: 90-95), argued that women managers perform higher than men in several managerial circumstances. Women are referred by Rowold (2010: 630), as effective managers, capable of taking organisations to the next level.

In general, however, employees in an organisation refer to all the workers in the organisation who are not managers. They are regarded as one of the most critical stakeholders to an organisation because of their basic function in the organisation of providing labour. Employees form the backbone of any organisation and if they are not treated fairly, they may be more likely to be engaged in unethical behaviour. This equitable balance is addressed in equity theory. In equity theory, each employee evaluates his or her inputs (effort, commitment) and outputs (compensation, promotion) versus the inputs and outputs of other employees (George and Jones 2011: 15). Equity theory is a model of motivation which explains how "people strive for fairness and justice in social exchanges or give-and-take relationships" (George and Jones 2011: 20). The national electricity provider has a huge workforce making it a more social organisation. Therefore, it depends on the extent at which managers at the national electricity provider uphold fairness in all aspects of management/motivation ranging from sharing of resources, awarding promotions, salary increments and handling conflict as well as their involvement in critical matters that affect the organisation such as, privatisation policies, expansion and employee bonus schemes.

### **The Political Environment at the National Electricity Provider**

The political environment, also known as the government environment refers to the various factors that are a result of government actions and these include the degree or extent of government involvement in the affairs of public institutions (Minnaar and Bekker 2005: 21-23). The factors can be in the form of government policy, treasury instructions, political stability or instability, import and export policies on electricity, subsidy policy, labour law, environmental law and trade restrictions (Du Toit et al. 2010: 130). It is clear from the list above that political factors have an impact on organisations and how they

conduct business. According to Du Toit et al. (2010: 130), management decisions are continually affected by the intensity of politics, especially the political pressures that are exerted by the ruling government administration and management. In particular, government affects the national electricity provider in a regulating capacity through legislation, treasury instructions, the annual budget, taxation, import and export policy on power and price controls. Government has an effect on market developments through its expenditure and in most of the cases where it is a major producer or a monopoly (in the case of the national electricity provider), government competes for labour, resources and capital making the task of a manager all the more challenging since managers are expected to study the various complex activities of government. It is important to mention at this point that government is viewed as the most powerful and highest authority to whom the national electricity provider reports to. As stated by Minnaar and Bekker (2005: 21-23), government power originates from its responsibility to deliver services and goods to its citizens as obligated by the constitution.

The manner or approach in which government influences decisions by the powers vested in it speaks volumes about the government politicking at the national electricity provider. In most instances government power is undesirable, undesirable because government interferes with the personal freedom of individual organisations/groups.

The national electricity provider's political environment influences the manner in which the utility provider is run with government playing a superior, powerful and significant role from a constitutional obligation to the normal praxis of public administration and management. In a democratic state, the involvement of government is an obligated move despite the ills of its bureaucratic processes. A point of departure and significance is that government allocates an annual budget to the national electricity provider which it uses as a basis to set the selling price of electricity which is usually pegged at a subsidised rate. Setting prices at a subsidised rate resultantly affects cash flow and financial position for the national electricity provider. In fact, the national electricity provider has been operating at a loss with the blame levelled against government's involvement, which is genuinely

a noble accusation. The budgetary bidding process is a political process in its own right that calls for continuous engagements between the senior managers of the national electricity provider and the government. Despite its obligated responsibility, to provide funding, it would appear that the political engagements between government and seniors managers often reduce the national electricity provider to a beggar or borrower and once funding is extended, government becomes even more powerful and hence dictate the pace.

The government of Zimbabwe provides rules and regulations that guide the board of directors on how to run the organisation while the CEO provides strategic leadership and guidance to the organisation. The CEO does so by inspiring the entire workforce in pursuance of the organisation's vision and mission statement from which the strategic management processes are crafted. By exercising the various powers vested in them, CEOs can determine the future of organisations. On the other hand, junior managers down the organisational structure ladder ensure that the day-to-day operations/management functions are performed through planning, organising, leading and controlling while employees provide service/labour.

For a country such as Zimbabwe, that has of late become abnormal, characteristic of a dysfunctional government that has made headlines in SADC and the international community, the political environment at the national electricity provider is not conducive. It depicts high levels of animosity, political infighting and a culture of intolerance and resistance to change from within the workforce and outside making the life of a manager all the more difficult. Zimbabwe is no longer the Zimbabwe of the 1980s, yet it is required to provide basic products and services to citizens. Organisations of today are presented with political environments which are characterised by change (Robbins 2009: 250), unfortunately the national electricity provider cannot manage all the pressures due to the state of the economy. With workers demanding pay increases and improvement in conditions of services, against near to zero revenue collection from the rate payers, the national electricity provider's political environment remains a threat to the normal functioning of the organisation. Things are not easy as they should be because individuals are concerned with fending for themselves at the expense of the organisation.



### The Common Goals

Organizations are basically social units that aim at realizing their goals. Organizations develop their goals from the goals of the individual employees. It is important to note that it is always not possible to reflect all individual goals in organizational goals taking into account that the organization has so many employees who have different goals. The differences in goals alone pose as threat to the existing political tempo in an organization. According to Veluri (2009: 569), a goal is the desired state of an organization's existence. A goal is a primacy of orientation to the attainment of specific goal defining characteristics of an organization that distinguishes it from other type of social systems. According to Drucker (2004), goals are important in every field, more specifically where performance and results are directly related to the survival and growth of the organization. Goals provide the following:

1. Organize and explain the whole range of business phenomenon in a few general statements
2. Allow one to predict behavior of employees in an organization
3. Appraise the soundness of decisions when they are still being made (Veluri, 2009: 569)

### Biographical Profile of Employees

The following section discusses the results on biographical data. The analysis of the biographical profile of the national electricity provider's workforce covered age, experience, gender, qualification and employees' position.

#### Respondents' Age

Table 1 shows that the majority of the workforce fall in the age group of 40 to 49, which is 47.80%, followed by 30 to 39 age group (29.60%), 50 to 59 age group (11%), 20 to 29 age group (7.50%), over 60 years (4.20%) while the age group of below 20 is only 0.60%. From this analysis, it is clear that the National Electricity Provider' workforce is largely represented by the middle aged class of between 40 and 49 age group. These are obviously individuals with high aspirations, expectations and goals to the extent of making an impact on the political environmental tempo of the organization.

**Table 1: Respondents' age**

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Below 20 years	2	0.6	0.6	0.6
20 - 29 years	25	7.4	7.5	8.1
30 - 39 years	99	29.4	29.6	37.6
40 - 49 years	160	47.5	47.8	85.4
50 - 59 years	37	11.0	11.0	96.4
60 years and over	14	4.2	4.2	100.0
Total	337		100.0	

From this analysis it is clear that the national electricity provider's workforce is largely represented by the middle-aged class. Middle-aged class employees have the advantage of being resourceful and in most of the cases they form groups or team up for good cause (Kunze 2011: 2). Rowold (2010: 630) provides a similar view by reporting that middle-aged employees are regarded as resourceful to the company though the elderly are regarded as the most committed to the organisation. Nasurdin and Khuan (2011: 273) report that older employees are more inclined to focus on feelings of personal significance and interpersonal values, they have strong social relations with other employees, and they view the organisation as a source of social satisfaction. On the other hand a younger workforce is more likely to be consumed by the need for economic security and successes (Du Toit et al. 2009) and tend to coordinate their needs with those of other individuals in a more transactional manner. Gillert and Schal (2011: 98) argue that age is an important factor in influencing the perceived cooperation within and outside the group. The point is, the age factor has an influence on inter-personal relations and perceptions that tend to affect the flow of work. The fact that, the national electricity provider has a fairly younger to middle-aged workforce resembles a promising resourceful workforce that strives to give maximum effort towards their day-to-day task within the organisation.

#### Experience

It is clear that the majority of the respondents have spent between 6 and 10 years of service, which is 59.10%, followed by those who have spent 2 to 5 years (20.70%). Those with 11 to 15 years of work experience are third (10.10%), followed by those with more than 15 years



(9.20%); while those with experience levels less than one year are 3.4%. It appears that, generally employees at the National Electricity Provider do stay for a reasonably lengthy period. For instance, those who stay for between 6 to 10 years and 11 to 15 years form the majority of the workforce. Employee's experience levels are a determinant factor in the day to day operations of the organization. If employees have a reasonably longer period of engagement with the organization, their perceived view of organizational politics may not be the same as those who have lesser years or no experience at all.

Employee experience plays a major role in both the employer and the employee as both tend to benefit. An experienced employee improves on skill and competencies, while the employer benefits in terms of increased performance levels by the employee; hence an increase in the production levels of the organisation. Studies by Thomas and Feldman (2009: 90-95) and Kunze (2011: 4) revealed that experienced employees improve their skills ultimately benefiting the organisation. According to Louw et al. (2011: 2-9) experience positively contributes to the development of employee competencies. Competencies represent the synthesis of a variety of skills, technologies, and knowledge streams that generate a competitive advantage for an organisation (Jauhari 2006). Further, experience improves the employee's social competencies (Louw et al., 2011: 2-9). Social competencies refer to a combination of observable and applied knowledge, skills and behaviours that create a competitive advantage for an organisation' (Jauhari 2006: 123). Thus, experienced employees' interpersonal and communication skills can improve the competitive advantage of the national electricity provider. The point underscored by these findings boil to the fact that an experienced employee is a critical resource to an organisation which the national electricity provider cannot afford to lose.

### Gender

It is clear that the national electricity provider is predominantly male dominated with 74.50%, with the remaining 24% representing females. It is important to note that most of the jobs/professions at the national electricity provider are those professions which are predominately pre-

ferred by men. For example, engineers, technicians, and fitters. In most African states, there is a stereotyped view that technical professions are for men, which could be the reason, why there are more men than women at this organisation. However, it is critical to note that despite the fact that the national electricity provider has more men than women, women generally proved to be more effective than men particularly when it comes to taking up challenging work. For example, studies by Thomas and Feldman (2009: 90-95), found that women leadership can brace up for more challenging tasks in the contemporary world. Rowold's (2010: 630) study on gender performance in organisations revealed that women can successfully and effectively tackle challenges better than their male counterparts, an indication that the national electricity provider may consider increasing female employees as well as appointing them in senior management positions.

### Qualification

The majority of the respondents have a diploma qualification (25.50%), followed by those with an undergraduate degree (20.50%), while 16% have an honours degree (Tables 2). The national electricity provider's core service is to generate electricity and the core profession is the electrician that requires a minimum qualification of a diploma. Overall, the national electricity provider has an educated workforce with almost each and every employee holding an ordinary level school certificate. At least all the employees are literate. Education brings immeasur-

**Table 2: Qualification**

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Below A level	9	2.7	2.8	2.8
"O" level	15	4.5	4.6	7.3
Certificate	37	11.0	11.3	18.7
Diploma	86	25.5	26.3	45.0
Undergraduate degree	69	20.5	21.1	66.1
Honors/B Tech	54	16.0	16.5	82.6
Masters	42	12.5	12.8	95.4
PhD	9	2.7	2.8	98.2
Other	6	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	327	97.0	100.0	

able benefits to both the worker and the employee; the finding that all the employees have at least a secondary education level and that the majority have a diploma suggests that the national electricity provider employees are skilled and with time they will acquire or gain considerable experience ultimately improving on their performance and in the overall benefiting the organisation (Thomas and Feldman 2009: 90-95). In support of these views, Bolton and Subramanian (2010: 1) emphasise that employee ability constitutes the quantifiable characteristics such as education and work experience of which education is the easiest measurable factor. Thomas and Feldman (2009: 90-95) argue that countries that show significant improvements in educating their citizens registered a remarkable increase in economic growth; hence education is key to economic prosperity. Martins and Jin (2010: 538) argue that there are even social returns that accrue to core workers when one gets educated, thus an educated employee, by demonstrating what he/she has learnt teaches core workers one or two tricks, can also lead by example and can be a role-model to other employees. In the overall, an educated employee is trainable further as he/she has acquired basic skills before. Taking into account that the national electricity provider has an averagely educated workforce, there is obviously room to staff-develop and train them so as to improve their performance.

### **Position in the Organization**

It is interesting to note that the greater number of the respondents reflects that electricians are employed as electricians (31.40%), lower level managers (16.30%), middle level management (16.60%), office administrators (10.80%), clerical staff (9.8%), general workers (3.70%), senior management (7.1%) while other positions such as drivers, painters and maintenance personnel form part of the 4.30%. In general, the position an employee holds in the organisation impacts on the decisions they make, thus senior management is involved with strategic matters at the national electricity provider such as vision and mission statements and policy formulation since they are the most senior while the electricians provide labour as delegated to them by first-line managers. It is critical to note that the flow of work within the various positions at the national electricity provider follows the lines of communication as depicted by the organogram.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS AT THE NATIONAL ELECTRICITY PROVIDER**

At organisational level the implications of organisational politics are very critical in nature (Buchanan and Badham 2007). Political behaviours are found to have both functional and dysfunctional effects at organisational level. At the national electricity provider, organisational politics portrays a dysfunctional state of affairs as opposed to a functional scenario. It is common knowledge that electrical power generation in most of the Southern African countries is a crisis partly affecting South Africa while Zimbabwe is experiencing the worst ever black out/load shedding challenges. Zimbabwe is now close to two decades without sustainable electrical power generation which has negatively affected its economy. According to Kachembere (2012), industrial expansion, and the manufacturing sectors have drastically scaled down due to inadequate electrical power generation thereby negatively affecting the whole economy.

Several manufacturing firms and industries including the agricultural sectors have since scaled down making the life of the manager all the more challenging. The job creation strategies by the government and partnering industries have suffered a heavy blow due to continuous company closures with some companies such as Nestle Zimbabwe, almost all clothing manufacturing firms, and mining giants such as Mhangura mine and BHP Platinum and many others have since scaled down or closed operations with no hope of reopening due to a lack of electrical power. The majority of the youth are now out of employment, reducing them to mere beggars with the girl child resorting to prostitution which has become rife, ultimately fuelling the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Crime levels in the streets and city outskirts have become increasingly too high. The unemployed boy child has joined the so-called gangsterism fraternity, thereby menacing the once admired streets which are ever dark due to a lack of street lighting. Burglary and robbery have become the order of the night since the cities and locations are most of the time in the dark. Generally, the life of an ordinary Zimbabwean has been worsened by the power crisis reducing the overall life expectancy of an ordinary citizen to just 55 years. Poverty levels have reached alarming levels with the average citizen surviving by under \$4.00 per day.

The World Bank (2011) reports that the water reticulation systems for Zimbabwe was no longer functioning due to load shedding, exposing citizens to drinking water from unsafe sources thereby negatively affecting the health of the populace whose life expectancy has shot down to 55 years. The World Bank (2011) seconds the view with a damning report on the impact of load shedding in the developing world (of which Zimbabwe is part), as reducing the life expectancy due to lack of clean water caused by electricity inadequacy. The power generation crisis has also affected the functioning of the hospitals since medical personnel in hospitals do require electrical power to carry on with medical operations. According to Mawire (cited by Kachembere 2012), Chinhoyi provincial hospital is reeling under a myriad of operational challenges, chief among them, the current electricity blackouts which have put the lives of patients into danger. The shortage of electricity has forced ZESA to ration supplies to both commercial and domestic users with some areas going for more than 10 hours per day without electricity (Own Correspondent 2012).

### CONCLUSION

The paper has provided an overview of the nature and extent of organizational politics at the National Electricity Provider in a SADEC country (Zimbabwe), identifies the role-players and also analysed the biographic profile of the employees subjected to the organisational politics. The organization's common goal is to generate electricity for the country, however in most cases there is always goal incongruence amongst the role players with individual employees aspiring to achieve their own goals which may be too distant from those of the organization.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The study identified four main role-players in the political system as the board of directors, employees, senior managers and the government. Central to all four players are goals, which ignite a rife political environment at the national electricity provider. The study therefore recommends the following measures within the political system:

- ♦ The creation of a fund to steer the commissioning of massive power projects from the available natural resources Zimbabwe has such solar energy, coal and hydro power from the Zambezi River;

- ♦ A positive engagement of all the role-players in the political system in which players seek to reach consensus in finding means to a permanent solution to the perennial load shedding for the country;
- ♦ Involvement of all the key stakeholders to the organisation in dealing with organisational politics matters and company level and from the ministry level;
- ♦ Senior managers such as the board of directors and CEOs must strive to amass resources for the organisation;
- ♦ Encouraging a win-win situation in dealing with political dilemmas; and
- ♦ Building an atmosphere of fairness and transparency through effective communication.

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