Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to implement the concept of the “political iceberg” and to investigate its hidden or submerged part comprised of motives and latent triggers lying behind leaders’ political behavior, and which remains almost unexplored. Specifically, drawing on the abundant literature at the intersection of leadership and organizational politics, the authors examine – what drives leaders to engage in political behavior?

Design/methodology/approach – Public sector organizations are characterized by a high level of organizational politics and are therefore suitable for this research. A semi-structured interview formed the main data-gathering instrument. The authors conducted interviews with 14 leaders across public sector organizations. The findings are based on a qualitative analysis of the interviews.

Findings – Two key themes were analyzed: leaders’ motives to engage in political behavior to achieve corporate interests; leaders’ motives to engage in political behavior for personal interests. On the one hand, motives for political behavior are directed toward the general good, such as accomplishing organizational goals, attaining resources and managing change. On the other hand, motives to engage in political behavior may focus inter alia on such, personal interests as one’s career in the organization, gaining an advantage or other self-interests.

Originality/value – To date, research has focused primarily on the visible tip of the political iceberg. This study is part of a new stream of qualitative studies of political behavior. To gain a complete picture of organizational life, this study focuses on the hidden side of the political iceberg and has revealed the motives for political behavior.

Keywords Public sector, Qualitative study, Organizational politics, Political iceberg, Leader’s political behaviours

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Politics are known to be prevalent at the leadership level while they accomplish organizational and personal objectives (Doldor et al., 2013; Manzie and Hartley, 2013). Political activity serves as a foundational element of most leadership behavior (Ferris and Hochwarter, 2011; Pfeffer, 1981). Recently, within the field of organizational politics, increasing attention has been dedicated to understanding politics in leadership roles (Doldor, 2017). Further, theories of political leadership have garnered increased attention, with greater empirical interest placed into the nature of leaders’ political behavior (Ellen et al., 2013; Silvester and Dykes, 2007; Yammarino and Mumford, 2012). However, currently, there is little insight into what drives leaders to engage in organizational politics (Doldor et al., 2013). Until now, studies have mostly investigated what politics “does” in organizations, its implications and consequences (Lepisto and Pratt, 2012), rather than exploring the motivations for such action (Doldor, 2017; Doldor et al., 2013; Kapoutsis, 2016). This paper aims to address this research gap by exploring leaders’ drives for political behavior, thereby investigating organizational politics at a micro-level.
Despite many studies on organizational politics to date, Hochwarter (2012) argued the need for new interpretational approaches about this specific topic. We are inspired by Hall’s (1976) “iceberg” model, which serves as a helpful metaphor to understand the extent to which we currently understand organizational politics. The smaller part of the iceberg, which is above the surface, represents the visible, cultural dimension and includes behavior and some belief-structure. The vast hidden part of the iceberg includes the underlying beliefs, values and thought patterns that promulgate the behavior. This is to say, the model will help us distinguish between the more illuminated aspects of organizational politics and the hidden sides that have not yet been exposed. They are invisible at first until reflected in action. Since so much research focuses on behavior, tactics and outcomes of organizational politics (Hochwarter, 2012), comparable to the tip of the iceberg, the hidden and subconscious part of the political iceberg (see Figure 1), remain almost unexplored. Therefore, the research seeks to act as a bridge between them by trying to explain – What drives leaders to engage in political behavior? Through an examination of this question, we are drawn to explore the roots and motives behind leaders’ political behaviors.

The current study makes three contributions to the literature. First, while current studies of leaders’ engagement in politics neglect notions of learning and development (Doldor, 2017) we suggest a developmental perspective on leaders’ engagement in organizational politics by studying what drives them in the public sector to engage in workplace politics. Second, in response to Bass and Bass’s (2008) call for a more balanced perspective on political leadership, we attempt to recognize leaders’ wide range of motives to engage in political behaviors. Third, since qualitative research in organizational politics remains relatively rare despite its importance to the field (Ferris and Treadway, 2012), our work provides greater contextual information which “leads[s] to new insights that may not be recognized in existing theoretical work” (McFarland et al., 2012, p. 116). Using a qualitative research design may add depth and comprehensive understanding to innovative ideas concerning leaders’ political behavior, especially because this is an exploratory study. Also, since “situational frames are the building blocks of both individual lives and institutions” (Hall, 1976, p. 140), public sector organizations may serve as proper platform for studying leaders’ motives and drives for political behaviors.

We begin with a review of the theoretical background of political leadership and individual political behaviors. We then describe the methodology and data collection used in the qualitative procedures. Finally, we discuss the findings, their practical implications and directions for future studies.

Figure 1. The political iceberg
Theoretical background

Leaders and organizational politics

"[T]he existence of workplace politics is common to most organizations" (Gandz and Murray, 1980, p. 244). Hence, as a derivative of this organizational reality, workplace political behavior is also a prevalent social phenomenon that is assessed as "an indispensable component of organizational life" (Hochwarter, 2012, p. 33). Specifically, with regard to leaders' political behavior, political activity serves as a foundational and intrinsic element of most leadership behavior (Ferris and Hochwarter, 2011; Pfeffer, 1981; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). To date, a vast body of scholarship has investigated various aspects of political behavior among leaders and has contributed significantly to our understanding (Ammeter et al., 2002; Ellen et al., 2013; Silvester and Dykes, 2007). Drawing on this line of research, we study drives for leaders' engagement in political behavior.

Our theoretical framework for studying leaders' political behavior draws on the classic work of Bolman and Deal (1991) who developed four perspectives, or frames, for understanding organizations and leadership: structural, human resource, political and symbolic. This study focuses on the political frame that views organizations as "arenas of continuing conflict and competition among different goals or interest for scarce or limited resources" (Bolman and Deal, 1991, p. 512). We concur with Rouleau and Balogun (2011) in suggesting that in this arena managers play a crucial role and need to be "politically able" to achieve their personal and organizational aims. On the practical level in the organizational setting "political activity is a valuable and even necessary skill for managers, particularly among senior ranks" (Hartley et al., 2015, p. 201). In organizational life individuals and groups work together purposefully, while maintaining diverse interests (Brass, 2002) and with differing access to power and resources. Drawing on this argument, we contend that, as managers fulfill their daily tasks and assert responsibility, they display political behavior, while their drives to engage in political behavior come from various sources. Managers' status allows them to permit or deny valuable access to or distribution of resources. This argument finds support in Bolman and Deal's (1991, p. 512) notion that "political leaders or managers are advocates and negotiators who value realism and pragmatism. They invest their time in networking, building coalitions and a power base and negotiating compromises to settle disputes". In this political arena they are likely to demonstrate different motivations for political behavior which may reveal a constructive but also a destructive aspect (Ellen et al., 2013). Similarly, Doldor (2017) has suggested that political leadership relies on political tactics ranging from the pro-social (coalitions, friendliness, networking, self-promotion) to anti-social (attacking, blaming or exploiting others, coercion, blackmail). With this in mind, we now introduce leaders' political behaviors.

Individual political behavior in the organizational setting

The investigation of political phenomena in the organization setting places different scholars along a continuum between two constructs – organizational politics and individual political behavior (DuBrin, 2009; Harrell-Cook et al., 1999). Organizational politics have been described as a power game where tactics are designed to affect the accomplishment of worthy and desired outcomes (Pfeffer, 1992). This is reflected by informal approaches to gaining power and advantage through social influence in which five behaviors are strategically focused to maximize either short- or long-term interests (DuBrin, 2009). Perceptions of organizational politics have been defined as arising from an employee's subjective evaluation of the extent to which organizational members are engaging in illegitimate self-serving behavior (Ferris et al., 2002; Sun and Chen, 2017). Next, political behavior is defined as "the practical domain of power in action, worked out through the use of techniques of influence and other (more or less extreme) tactics" (Buchanan and Badham, 1999, p. 11). Put simply, political behavior is a general means by which employees attempt to
obtain and use power while “the goal of such behavior is to get one’s own way about things” (Griffin and Moorhead, 2011, p. 386). Additionally, a possible link between hidden motives and political behavior is political perceptions that are primarily concerned with what individuals subjectively experience, perceive, or feel (Ferris and Hochwarter, 2011). Since this perception is influenced by the extent to which the work environment is characterized by the self-serving behavior of co-workers and supervisors (Ferris et al., 2000), a circular process is revealed.

Studies have suggested that a blend of organizational and individual factors contribute to political behavior (Ferris et al., 1994; Hochwarter, 2012; Treadway et al., 2005). These personal factors primarily incorporate three areas: first, the political nature of human behavior (Ebstein et al., 2010; Hochwarter, 2012); second, predisposing personality factors (need for power, locus of control, Machiavellian tendencies, risk-seeking propensity, self-monitoring traits and the degree of emotional insecurity) (Ferris et al., 1994; Porter et al., 1981; Treadway et al., 2005); and third, the desire to avoid hard work (DuBrin, 2009, p. 24). Guided by these parameters, the current study concentrates on the personal level for an examination of leaders’ motives to engage in workplace political behavior.

Leaders’ political behavior
Among leaders, political behavior demonstrates a pattern of informal influence that is an intrinsic component of leadership (Ferris and Hochwarter, 2011). Scholars have suggested leaders must be politically skilled while attempting to be effective (Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981, 2010). Studies which adopted more “neutral language” about a leader’s political behavior (Ellen et al., 2013; Pfeffer, 2010) consider political behavior to be “activities taken within an organization to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one’s preferred outcomes” (Pfeffer, 1981).

Dalton’s (1959/2013, p. 219) classic study holds great value for understanding leaders’ behavior and their motivations within the “formal-official and informal-unofficial” contradictions. He explains these as “administration vs politics.” Specifically, managers’ practice consists of the interplay between the roles formally designated by the organization and the roles informally assumed by them as individuals. There is a continuing conflict between rational considerations (bureaucratic, efficiency-oriented, legalistic) and the non-rational aspects of organizational functioning (sentimental, clique-oriented, ego-satisfying). Although Dalton is primarily concerned with political behavior, he hints at hidden motives, such as unpublicized recruitment or retention incentives for key employees (Shulman in Dalton, 1959/2013). Managers, either as a result of personal motives or their obligations as member of informal groups, effectively devise ways for escaping the limits set by the formal role-structure (Stagner, 1961, p. 207). Respectively, the managerial phenomenon includes informal features such as power and control alongside its formal features. Research devoted to power in organizations mostly presents strategies for developing power (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006). While Tengblad (2006) found that approximately 36.9 percent of a director’s time is devoted to communication and decision-making, it is not surprising that political behavior is easily involved in managers’ tactics for gaining power and control. However, while skillful political behaviors are reflected in action, the motives behind them are hidden. These hidden motives occur in various situations. For example, a basic problem in negotiation lies in the interest motives of each side that are silent movers behind the hubbub of the conflicting positions (Fisher et al., 2011). As a result, leaders may remain intransigent, so the negotiation carries a high political cost (Raiffa et al., 2002).

Within the broad organization and leadership literature, most research analyses the personal and organizational outcomes that leaders’ politicking may yield. For example, Hope (2010) suggests that middle level managers engage in sense-giving as political behavior to control information flow, processes and decisions, and develop new strategic orientations.
during firm reorganization. Ahearn et al. (2004) found that a leader’s political skill accounts for a significant increment in team performance variance and is a significant predictor of objective team performance. Ammeter et al. (2002) consider the antecedents of political behavior, but emphasize leadership traits and leader attributes that contribute to political behavior and to leader and target audience outcomes. The comprehensive field of leadership also discusses the role of positive politics among leaders and the considerable good that results when leaders behave politically (Ellen et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2009). However, these researchers are mostly concerned with the outcomes of leaders’ political behavior. Very little exploration has been undertaken about the private motivations for such behavior; consequently, literature about the drives to engage in political behavior is limited (Kapoutsis, 2016). In our response to this need, we concentrate on drives for engagement in political behavior. Consistent with Ammeter et al. (2002) we attempt to explore the stimuli behind managerial political behavior with “no pejorative view of politics, characterizing politics as neither inherently good nor bad, but rather a fact of life and a feature woven into the very fabric of organizations” (2002, p. 752). This leads to the main research question:

**RQ1.** What drives leaders to engage in political behavior?

**Method**

**Rationale**

Qualitative methodology can lead to insights into the political topic by using subjective information describing the natural setting of the variables under consideration (MCFarland et al., 2012), as well as leaders’ internal worlds (Bolman and Deal, 1991). Public sector organizations are characterized by a high level of organizational politics (Vigoda-Gadot and Kapun, 2005), and are therefore suitable for this research. As such, public sector organizations serve as a natural frame and context in which political behavior easily occurs, and Hall (1976) recognized this as a basis for learning a new subject. Since our study is interested in discovering motives behind individual political behaviors, a qualitative approach is required. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state that “qualitative” implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined. When a phenomenon is not directly observable, conducting interviews is the appropriate methodology (Creswell, 2014). This is the case with our project, where participants in the study were provided an opportunity to articulate their perspective. We opted for semi-structured interviews as the main data-gathering instrument for research, because these offer sufficient flexibility to approach different respondents as individuals while still covering the same areas of data collection (Noor, 2008). In this respect, the questions were carefully designed to provide adequate coverage for the issue of research. The interviews lasted around approximately 50 minutes. In constructing the interview’s questions, we relied on existing literature on political behavior, but focused on the motives for this behavior. During the interview, respondents were asked to describe their motivations and to postulate about the motivations of other managers in their organizations to engage in political behavior, how they perceive these motives, and about the consequences of these behaviors in public sector organizations.

**Participants**

We used theoretical sampling, which refers to a selection method of participants who are deemed to be “particularly suitable for illuminating and extending relationships and logic among constructs” (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p. 27). The number of participants in phenomenological studies typically ranges between three and ten (Creswell, 2014). We held 14 managers interviews (7 women and 7 men), that provided the necessary information needed for answering the research question. We asked managers at the level of department heads in municipalities in Israel with seniority in the organization to take part in the study,
due to their understanding of the organizational politics (Doldor, 2017). We assume that they have extensive experience and knowledge about the organization and can provide information needed for the research. Therefore, all the interviewees held various middle management positions. All the interviewees possess academic degrees. Their average tenure was 8.6 years, and the average age was 42.

Data analysis
All interviews were recorded and transcribed for clear identification of the codes. Coding interviews involves four steps: coding starts with some general themes derived from reading the literature and adding themes and sub-themes as they appear (Miles and Huberman, 1994); we reorganized the data according to the codes. This enabled us to compare segments under each individual code, and to confirm that all the segments have the same meaning. Each researcher performed the coding separately, and then jointly reconciled any disagreements. Through this process, internal reliability was established through evaluation of the consistency with which instances were assigned to the same category by different judges (Silverman, 2005). A high level of inter-coder agreement is evidence that a theme has external validity, independent of the investigator’s preconceptions (Mitchell, 1979); the codes were named and were operationally defined to clarify meaning and to underpin the conceptual framework; Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that codes should be part of a governing structure and relate to one another coherently. Thus, the structure will include both codes that are more conceptually inclusive and other instances which are more differentiated. To permit a deeper understanding of the construct, we then organized the codes according to pattern codes, which relate to emergent theme, configuration or explanation. The quotations presented below have been translated into English.

Findings
Analysis of leaders’ interviews yielded two completely different triggers to engagement in political behavior. The themes are divided into two parts: political behavior can be used to advantage for promoting corporate interests or personal interests.

Corporate interests as motives to engagement in political behavior
Organizational goals. Willingness to promote organizational goals is one of the main drivers of political behavior among leaders in the public sector. However, organizational goals are a double-edged sword for political behavior. Leaders promote goals which they perceive as “right” for the organization. Only proponents or beneficiaries of these goals will cooperate and promote its achievement. By contrast, disagreement with the goals will not necessarily be made apparent. Passive resistance often conceals different perceptions of the organization and its goals:

In City Council meetings, managers who are loyal to the mayor back him. Those who resist him and want to keep their place sit quietly […] Although not all of them share the same political opinions, they respect him […] Even if they do not identify with him politically, they work to earn him trust and this gives him stability […].

Having opposite (political) views does not harm cooperation between the mayor and the deputy from the right-of-center party.

Attainment of organizational goals motivate leaders to invest effort in meeting these challenges, and causes people to engage in politics while at the same time believing that this energy is beneficial. These findings reinforce previous studies that have explained politics as a valuable and even necessary skill for managers when dealing with continuing conflicts and for achieving organizational compromises and common goals (Hartley et al., 2015;
Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). In addition, they are largely consistent with Smith et al.’s (2009) findings that effective political skill enables managers to influence subordinates in ways that promote organizational outcomes.

*The ability to change and influence.* Lewin’s (1951) classic theory has long hinted at the connection between change processes and political behavior. Extrapolating from Lewin, the distinctive feature of force-field analysis includes two broad types: those who support and push for change and those who resist it. In change processes, political behavior is perceived as essential and unavoidable to effect a leader’s desired change. Kumar and Thibodeaux (1990) advocated for the use of political strategies in planning organizational change. They suggested that the more significant the changes in organization, the more the political involvement, awareness and facilitation required by the change driver or agent. Buchanan (2008) documented several change-related consequences associated with agent political activity. Leaders’ reasons to initiate organizational change or to resist it motivate their use of status and power. These motivations to promote or resist change depend to a degree on whether the change is consistent what is perceived as desirable for the organization. However, political behavior does not always reveal the true motives behind the promotion of or resistance to change:

My approach is that if the system works, even if there are structural defects, it is subject to change. Trust in the existing system allows me to act in directions that I want, or put pressure in places where I can renew, change and do […] Break through existing barriers and express a voice and demand for change […] Similarly, if I want to change politically, to intervene, to speak and to decide otherwise.

*Resources achievement*

The political environment is perceived as an opportunity to accumulate resources rather than as a threat to their loss (Ferris and Hochwarter, 2011). Here leaders are motivated to use their power and connections with key officials and organizations such as government offices or the ruling party to mobilize resources for the benefit of their administrative center. In this respect, managers use their power to influence goals and policies through resource distribution (Landells and Albrecht, 2013). Political contacts are a visible reflection of hidden motives insofar as they further the attainment of various vital resources:

The mayor is involved in obtaining resources and control in various areas of government ministries. The understanding that he has a connection to the elected government is clear and it helps the Authority to receive more resources.

The vice mayor is associated with party XXX, and she has managed to get a lot of money. It stems from her status in the party.

*Personal interests as motives to engagement in political behavior*

*Personal organizational career.* A central career ambition of most managers is to progress to an executive position. In political settings managers select their course of action from a wide range of political tactics to achieve career objectives (Kapoutsis et al., 2012). The public sector is typically characterized by a hierarchical organizational structure with palpable competition for limited senior positions.

The possibility of promotion within the organizational hierarchy motivates managers to use different political tactics. As much as leaders aspire and are motivated to advance to the organization’s top, they perceive political behavior as legitimate, even if others in the organization are harmed by its results:

I am always striving for more. I want to advance. I love roles with responsibility […] Everyone in the municipality wants to advance. However, you can only advance, if you have Vitamin P [connections; from the Russian word Protekzia]. If you do not, you can apply for a million vacancies
and you will not get the job. Promoting competition will cause mistrust. If there are two candidates, one will dish on the second.

Vacancies are usually rigged. It’s not because a person has proven himself. He’s just close to X and X is close to Z. I never thought how to do it […] It is hard for me when evaluating candidates to give priority to someone who has seniority compared to someone who gives his soul.

**Self-interest.** Self-interest refers to the achievement of an individual’s personal goals rather than organizational goals (Buchanan and Badham, 2008). Managers may act deceptively by manipulating rules to attain their own goals, which do not always overlap with those of the organization (Dalton, 1959/2013). This behavior is categorized as political (Ferris et al., 2002), and viewed as “self-serving” (Gilmore et al., 1996). Political behavior includes informal employee activities that protect or promote self-interest by manipulating the thinking, perceptions or behavior of other organizational members (Hill et al., 2016; Perrewé et al., 2012). It is quite possible that when personal interests motivate leaders to behave and engage in political activity, others in the organization are “personally injured”:

Some people mock political actors, but they themselves are engaged in politics. If people are continually engaged in political activity […] and take advantage of the time to promote personal political interests, it is perceived as professionally negative and irresponsible.

**Discussion and conclusions**

This study offers a new research perspective on political behavior through the concept of the political iceberg which distinguishes between visible and hidden sides. To date, studies have focused primarily on the visible tip of the political iceberg. To draw a more complete picture, this study has focused on the hidden side of the political iceberg and has revealed the personal motives for political behavior of leaders. Additionally, this study is part of a new stream of qualitative studies of political behavior (Landells and Albrecht, 2017; McFarland et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The qualitative research method enabled us to probe leaders’ internal worlds (Bolman and Deal, 1991) as they act within public sector organizations, which are characterized by a high level of organizational politics (Andrews and Kacmar, 2001; Vigoda-Gadot and Kapun, 2005). The interviews permit a description, analysis and interpretation of political behavior, and an exploration of various political motives and drives, which expose some of the submerged political iceberg.

Three basic assumptions flow from the study’s findings, illuminating the relationship between the visible and hidden parts of the iceberg model. First, the interviewees report that they are motivated to think and behave politically in many organizational, personal and work situations. In particular, they reveal that political behaviors are likely to play a key role in their attempts to promote personal or organizational goals and processes. The interviewees reported how, as part of the managerial political atmosphere, daily routine includes cases where they behave politically to achieve their ends, whether these are corporate or personal. As described, within the structural rules of their organization varied informal pro-political acts and behaviors take place, for example, party association, relationship-based decisions, rule-bending and cliques and alliances. These findings are consistent with Dalton’s (1959/2013) observations regarding unofficial work practices managers display and the ways formal rules protect existing distributions of power, mostly on the part of managers who are likely to bypass formal rules through political behavior for personal motives. Also, the findings support previous studies which illuminate the informal behavior of managers such as power and control, strategies for developing power and their high potential to behave politically (DuBrin, 2009; Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006; Tengblad, 2006).

Second, consistent with Ellen et al. (2013), our findings illuminate both the wide range of political behavior’s possible stimuli and its uses at the leadership level on the part of those people most naturally involved in organizational politics. On the one hand, motives behind
political behavior are directed toward the general good, such as accomplishing organizational goals, attaining resources and managing change. Thus, leaders use their power and engage in political behavior to control decisions, processes and reorganization orientation (Hope, 2010). The interviewees revealed that they are motivated to utilize their political resources, professional skills or status to empower and promote collective interests at the organizational level. In general, behavior may deviate from organizational norms yet yield organizational results (Warren, 2003). From this perspective, political behaviors are perceived to be legitimate or consistent with the organizational goals or effectiveness (Fedor et al., 2008), rather than the point-of-view that “politics is evil” (Ferris and Treadway, 2012).

While interviewees indicate that they take care to further the organization’s interests, it is impossible to ignore the fact that they act according to their personal perception of “organizational interests.” As opposed to the private sector in which the value of the company is measured by customer valuation and the shareholder’s “bottom line” (Moore, 1995), public organizations are evaluated by measuring the public value it provides. This framework is designed for evaluation of a management focused on social values and goals, but at the same time incorporates politics into strategic decision-making (Weinberg and Lewis, 2009). In other words, the organizational goals or the public value agreed upon in the public sector tends to be subjective, depending on the managers’ perspectives and therefore subject to political behavior which is not characterized by transparency. Similarly, a process of organizational change that by its nature raises resistance and is exposed to political behavior results in exposing hidden “skeletons in the closet.” Under these circumstances, the phenomenon of exchange relations emerges; it is invisible but strongly encourages political behavior.

On the other hand, motives for political behavior also focus on a particular manager’s personal interests, which at times come at the expense of others. From this point-of-view, organizational politics can be frustrating, limiting and a negative drag on work life (Eldor, 2017). However, while this behavior may be considered as dysfunctional for some organizational members of the organization, it plays out as functional and beneficial to those who use it. Here, political behavior sometimes hides behind its “inner demons” such as Machiavellian tendencies, locus of control, emotional insecurity (Ferris et al., 1994; Porter et al., 1981; Treadway et al., 2005) desire to avoid hard work (DuBrin, 2009), or pursuit of concealed motives, ruthless reciprocity and necessary evil (Buchanan, 2008).

Third, the findings can be interpreted from another perspective, namely the informal-unofficial pattern of leaders’ political behavior. From this perspective, there are two levels to leaders’ political behavior: The overt level which is the more common one includes commitment to cliques, cooperation with the mayor, party association, stability or networks to attain needed organizational resource. In this vein, Buchanan (2008) has suggested that some prevalent political behaviors and tactics are also perceived to be common, for example, building networks, using “key players,” befriending power brokers and self-promotion. However, beneath the visible part of the common behaviors, there are hidden and less acceptable latent behaviors belonging to the political twilight zone. The interviewees report, for example, that appointees are usually selected on the basis of favoritism or connections rather than on their professional skills. In such cases, leaders consciously adopt an asymmetric tactic to achieve their goals at another’s expense.

To conclude: this study lays a cornerstone for understanding leaders’ motives for political behavior and suggests that a balanced perspective on political leadership is needed (Bass and Bass, 2008). Especially when bearing in mind the submerged part of the political iceberg, this study distinguishes between two kinds of drives behind leaders’ political behavior: corporate and personal. Since the current study was conducted in a public sector organization, it is important to note that our findings are consistent with those scholars who suggest that politics in public organizations are the dominant means by which actors achieve desired outcomes motivated by varied values and interests (Andrews and Kacmar, 2001).
Since managers in the public sector cannot expect perfect harmony, political behavior is inevitable. However, this behavior expresses quite a few hidden motives or even “inner demons” that must be exposed. We hope this study points out a new direction for the study of the hidden elements of political behavior.

Limitations and directions for the future
The concept of the political iceberg and the motivations behind political behavior in the organization is novel and points to a rich area of scholarship. However, together with its originality, our research design has limitations, which should be addressed. First, this is only an initial study of the hidden side of the political iceberg. We may safely assume that there are other hidden factors, such as values, beliefs, or thinking patterns that lead to involvement in organizational politics which need exposure in future research. Second, the study was based on a group of managers in the Israeli public sector. Inspired by Kajonius et al.’s (2016) findings that organizational climate and organizing principles are associated with managerial work, one suggestion for future study is to investigate how organizational climate affects the political behavior motives of managers. In this sense, we cannot ignore the possibility that structural and organizational characteristics and differences between the public and private sectors may have influenced the findings. Therefore, other studies in the private sector as well as more studies in the public sector are needed. Moreover, to deepen our understanding of managers’ motivations for political behavior, the narrative methodology can be employed to capture the experiential dimensions of political behavior and to understand the social conditions upon such political behaviors would be either beneficial or dysfunctional. Third, qualitative studies usually are based on small samples; care must be taken when drawing conclusions. Undoubtedly, additional qualitative research is required on both managers and workers from different sectors to confirm the findings of this study and to expand knowledge in the field. Fourth, qualitative research is appropriate as an exploratory study, but to strengthen the findings, quantitative research is required. Developing research instruments on the motives and goals of political behavior will enable studying broader populations to obtain empirical confirmation of this phenomenon.

Practical implications
Leadership with political astuteness is an integral element of the work of senior public servants (Manzie and Hartley, 2013). While the aim of managerial work in the public sector is to create public value (Moore, 1995, p. 28), we cannot ignore the reality that at the same time public organizations must demonstrate value upward to the authorities, taxpayers, donors and outward to their clients (Weinberg and Lewis, 2009). Responding to the expectations of all these political stakeholders means that managers must develop political strategies and the capacity to engage the stakeholder or authorizing environment (Moore and Moore, 2005). Moore (1995) argues that these public preferences are decided through politics and public deliberation about what is valuable.

In light of this study, leaders may gain a better understanding of the motives for divergent behaviors of all organizational stakeholders, and therefore not to try to eliminate organizational politics. Practically, they have to consider that motives to political behavior wide-ranging, and mapping and studying its bilateral factors in the workplace context is inevitable. In light of the complex reality faced by managers in the public sector, and the multitude of factors that must be taken into account in decision-making processes, they must learn to identify other people’s hidden political motives, while being aware of their own motives for political behavior. Practically, they should allow the use of politics in their organization: Aristotle famously wrote that as part of natural human behavior politics could not be avoided. However, it should not be permitted to become a corrupting force.
References


About the authors
Aviv Kidron has a PhD Degree and is a Member of the Department of Human Services in the Academic Yezreel Valley College. Her research interests are within the fields of organizational behavior, human resource management and manager-employee relationship. She is a Member of the Management of “The Israeli Association for the Study of Labor Relations”. Aviv Kidron is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: avivb@yvc.ac.il

Hedva Vinarski-Peretz is Lecturer at the Department of Political Science and Health System Management at the Max Stern Yezreel Valley College and Head of the practice: Public Sector Internal and External Audit. Also, she is Adjunct Lecturer at the Department of Public Policy, Tel Aviv University. She previously held visiting-scholar at the Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska, USA.

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