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## **The inevitability of organisational politics: A review of literature**

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### **Abstract**

This article looks at the reasons as to why organisational politics is practiced everywhere. How managerial employees influence others and manipulate their power bases. It determines, therefore, that using influence is the core of management activity. It explores the least and most popularly used tactics for influencing superiors and subordinates. Given that the majority of members of modern organizations recognize and acknowledge that they are, in essence, political systems, they employ various political tactics to more successfully seize power.

**Keywords:** Organisational politics, power tactics, political players devious political approaches

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### **Introduction**

In the workplace, political behavior is common and equally unavoidable. It is hard to avoid the power and political relationships that occur between coworkers, regardless of your designation or what are your actions (Kakabadse, 1983) <sup>[5]</sup>. Any attempt to suppress it is most certain to fail because the forces that encourage it are so powerful (Gray & Starke, 1988) <sup>[4]</sup>.

### **Politics in organizations**

To some, the term office politics connotes deceit deception and personal gain. To others it is an awareness of the subtle ways of winning a favour, advancing your career, and gaining power-inevitable parts of organizational life. (Dubrin, 1978) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Office politics is worked on everywhere, many a sales clerk has worn a dress he could not afford in order to impress his store manager. Many an intern has complimented his or her chief on the brilliance of his/her diagnostic skills in order to facilitate receiving a positive future reference. Why office politics is omnipresent can be revealed through a number of fundamental reasons such as:

### **Pyramidal Structure of Organization**

According to "Abraham Zaleznik," Organizations are prisms of politics in which individuals fight for dominance in a scarce economy (Zaleznik, 1970) <sup>[8]</sup>. There is a finite amount of power that may be divided among the numerous individuals vying for more of it.

### **Lack of Objective Standards of Performance**

Assume that you are a commercial artist. Your firm informs you that in order to become a supervisor you must first complete 500 assignments acceptable to clients. Your path to a promotion would be so clear-cut that you would not need to use political maneuvers to attain a supervisory position. Few organizations have such clear-cut measures of performance or well-defined steps for promotion. Because of this fact, people resort to job politics in an attempt to move ahead or gain advantage.

The adage, "it's not what you know but who you know,"

does apply to organizations that lack clear cut work objectives. (Dubrin, 1992) <sup>[3]</sup>.

### **Environmental Uncertainty**

When Institutional members operate in an unstable and unpredictable environment, where in it is difficult to specify what they should be accomplishing, they tend to behave politically.

### **Change in Institutional resources**

Organizations must reduce resources when they make cuts to increase efficiency. Members of the organization, then resort to political activity in order to protect what they have.

### **Zero-Sum-Reward Allocation Practice**

Organizations must reduce resources when they make cuts to increase efficiency. Members of the organization then resort to political activity in order to protect what they have. (Robbins, 1998) <sup>[7]</sup>.

### **Emotional Insecurity**

Self-confidence or emotional security is another individual variable influencing political behavior. Some people resort to politics as a way of ingratiating themselves with superiors because they lack confidence in their talents and skill."(Dubrin, 1992) <sup>[3]</sup>.

### **Need for Acceptance**

Many workers practice politics in the office simply because they want to be accepted and liked by others. To accomplish this end, they conduct special treatment for co-workers and carry out other relatively harmless ploys (Dubrin, 1992) <sup>[3]</sup>.

### **Work Avoidance In an institutional sub-unit**

Where people are not upwardly mobile, political maneuvers are often used to avoid work. The rationale for this way of behaving is that, if you get in good with the boss, you won't have to work too hard (Dubrin, 1992) <sup>[3]</sup>.

In view of the above points, it is thus important to realise that organizations do not operate in a vacuum. There are internal and external environments which consist of a power

nexus with significant implications for political climate of the organizations.

**Power tactics: Turning power into influence**

Power tactics refer to how managerial employees influence others and manipulate their power bases. In order to carry out their duties, managers must use their influence to persuade individuals external to the work group whose support is essential to the unit's success as well as their subordinates. This calls for a manager to be able to exert influence over the actions of peers, higher-level supervisors, and subordinates within the organization as well as any external parties with whom they maintain relationships by exercising power upward, downward, and laterally in the chain of commands.

Therefore, using influence is the core of management activity. Kipnis *et al.* (1984) [6] conducted a study whereby, managers from different organizations were asked to cite real-world instances where they tried to influence the actions of their peers, seniors, or subordinates. On analysing the resulting incidents seven techniques of influence were found, and they include following: (Kipnis *et al.*, 1984) [6].

1. Use of facts and data to support the development of a logical argument
2. Use of impression management, flattery and the creation of goodwill.
3. Mobilization of other people in the organization.
4. Use of negotiation through the exchange of benefits or favours.
5. Use of a direct and a forceful approach
6. Gaining the support of higher levels in the organization to backup a request.
7. Use of organizationally derived rewards and punishments.
8. The researchers found that personnel don't rely on the 7 tactics the same way.

Table 1 shows the least and most popularly used tactics for influencing superiors and subordinates.

**Table 1:** Usage of Power Tactics: From Most to Least Popular

*Most Popular to least popular*
*While Managers want to get something done by superiors*
Number 1
Number 3
Number 2
Number 4
Number 5
Number 6
* While Managers want to get something done by subordinates*
Number 1
Number 5
Number 2
Number 3
Number 4
Number 7

(Adapted from: Kipnis, *et al.*, 1984, p. 62) [6]

Furthermore, the researchers found four incident variables that influence the choice of a power strategy. (Kipnis *et al.*, 1984, p.62-64) [6]

**1. The authority of the manager:** There are two ways in which power influences the techniques chosen. Initially,

compared to managers with less power, individuals in positions of control over resources that are prized by others or who are seen as being in a dominant position use a wider range of persuasion tactics. Next, Compared to managers with less power, those with more power employ decisiveness more frequently.

**2. The Manager's Objectives**

Managers might change their tactics depending on their goals. In order to obtain advantages from their superior, managers frequently resort to manipulating perceptions, soft-phrasing, and cultivating amicable connections, that is they use friendliness.

**3. The Manager's Achievement Anticipations**

Additionally, managers adjust their tactics based on how well they anticipate persuading the targets. When historical performance suggests a high likelihood of success, managers employ straightforward requests to elicit compliance. In situations where results are unpredictable, managers are more likely to resort to coercion and punishment in order to accomplish their goals.

**4. The Culture of Organizations**

The strategies that are deemed proper for a manager to employ are heavily influenced by the organizational culture in which they operate. While some cultures value reason and friendliness, others place more value on punishment and aggression.

**Political approaches to growing power**

Given that the majority of members of modern organizations recognize and acknowledge that they are, in essence, political systems, they employ various political tactics to more successfully seize power. Over the years, Numerous political tactics have been proposed to acquire influence within organizations. For instance, a group of five researchers conducted interviews with 87 managers from 30 different electronics companies in Southern California to learn about the strategies employed by political players to manipulate the system to achieve their goals. (Allen *et al.*, 1979) [1]

The results of the study revealed seven categories of political tactics, which are listed below together with the percentage of respondents who mentioned the tactic.

**Attacking or blaming others**

This includes making the competitor appear unfavorable to powerful members of the organization. As the saying goes, "when something goes wrong the first thing to be fixed is the blame." (54.04%)

**Information usage**

Information is manipulated (To create the impression of selective disclosure), suppressed (When it could be harmful to one's own interests), or used to intimidate another person (To conceal or misuse a key detail that the political actor fears could harm him). (54.04%)

**Building an image and managing impressions**

This strategy encompasses general approaches, attire and hairstyle, understanding of organizational customs, highlighting accomplishments, giving the impression of being involved in significant activities, increasing personal

qualities, and cultivating a reputation for being well-liked, eager, honest, considerate, and other qualities that the individual believes are valued by powerful members of the organization. (52.9%)

### **Building a Support Network**

Encouraging others to comprehend one's ideas before making a decision, making the decision before calling a meeting, and encouraging others to contribute to the concept to ensure their commitment are all examples of idea support building. (36.8%)

### **Praising others/ingratiation**

Lower level managers employed phrases like "buttering up the boss", "apple polishing", and additional, more colorful phrases. Senior managers frequently talked about building strong relationships and giving compliments to others. (25.3%)

### **Power coalitions and strong allies**

This tactic includes getting key people on your side. (25.3%)

### **Association with Influential People**

This includes maintaining alliances and winning the support of powerful People (24.01%).

### **Attaining power through enhancing your image**

A number of political strategies are geared specifically toward creating a favorable image of yourself. Since a favorable image is often a by-product of good performance, some of these strategies border on being meritorious or non-political. (Dubrin, 1978) [2] These are:

#### **1. Impression management**

Often the attention of others is directed towards superficial aspects of the self-such as clothing and appearance other variations of this strategy include telling other people about your success. A more devious version of impression management is to minimise the potential adverse impact of a poor decision by giving the impression that the decision was sound or by rationalising the mistake in some plausible way.

#### **2. Be distinctive and formidable**

Be distinctive or unique in terms of something about your accomplishments, speech, or mode of dress.

#### **3. Develop expertise**

A person who controls the vital resource of important information automatically becomes a more powerful individual by virtue of acquiring expert power.

#### **4. Keep your nose to the grindstone**

Another descriptive term for this strategy is "by their works ye shall know them". When faced with criticism of what you are doing, ignore your critics. As time passes and you accumulate good results, your critics will change their opinion of you and your work. -

#### **5. Display loyalty**

What is helpful in gaining favour is a willingness to defend your company or your boss in time of trouble.

### **6. Volunteer for assignment**

Offering to take on tasks that don't really fit your job description shows the kind of initiative that employers find admirable.

### **Acquiring power through offensive strategies**

**A variety of strategies deal with taking the fault in carrying out maneuvers that may increase your power such as**

1. \*Help your boss succeed-\*
2. \*Identify and win support of influential\* - Maintain alliances with powerful people, is the most useful general purpose method of increasing your power base.
3. \*Mutual back scratching\* - The person who seeks power should help others, but they should also be upfront about the fact that they owe someone something and that they will be held accountable for their actions.
4. \*Planting an ally\* If you want your cause championed, it helps to have an insider talk about the advantages of your cause.
5. \*Acquire seniority\*-Longevity in an organisation garners some respect and privilege.
6. \*Camel's head in the tent\* A gradual approach is sometimes the most effective means of acquiring power just as the camel works his way into the tent inch by inch. You might acquire power in a step by step manner until you emerge victorious.
7. \*Make a quick showing\* A display of dramatic results can be useful in gaining acceptance for your efforts or those of your group.
8. \*Control of vital information\* If you have vital information at your disposal it enhances your status. A person with trade secrets in his/her head is more valuable to the organisation than the market researcher who reviews periodically in search of public information.
9. \*Keep informed\* In addition to controlling vital information, it is politically important to be kept informed
10. \*Make effective use of power\* Knowing how and when to praise people is a valuable skill when trying to build your reputation in an organisation.
11. \*Laugh at your boss's jokes\* When you indicate by your laughter that you appreciate your boss's sense of humor, it helps to establish rapport between you and him or her.
12. \*Become a crucial subordinate\*-Your task in becoming a crucial subordinate is to identify crucial tasks facing your superior and then to demonstrate your interest in helping.

### **Machiavellian political approaches**

Any technique of gaining power or favour can be devious if practised in extreme. A person who supports his boss by helping him carry company property out the door for his personal use is being devious. Some devious political strategies described by Dubrin (1978) [2], which he recommended not to be followed are listed below:

1. \*Blackmail\* - Deviant person threatens to make public the deviant behaviour of another unless the former makes certain concessions to the latter.
2. \*Character assassination\* - Character assassins are not openly critical of their victims. Instead they drop innuendoes to have the latter removed from the scene.

3. \*Remove the opposition\* - The ultimate weapon in outdistancing a rival for promotion is to have that person physically removed or transferred out of that person your area.
4. \*Divide and Rule\*
5. The object is to have subordinates fight among themselves, therefore giving you the balance of power.
6. \*The Set-up\* - The object is to place a person in a position where he or she will look ineffective.
7. \*Receive undue credit\* - The object is to receive credit for work performed by subordinates and not allow them to share in the praise.

### **Conclusion**

Organizational power and politics is finally coming out of the closet. Many Orders of organizational behavior have begun to expose the previously hush hush tactics people used to gain advantage in all areas of work. Although the art and practice of organizational politics is becoming more public, it is still a topic surrounded by secrecy and denial.

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