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The Effects of Power and Politics in Modern Organizations and its Impact on Workers' Productivity

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Abstract
In one aspect, power can be used to get a job done, on the other hand, it can also be used for the wrong reasons and politics is the influence gained from power. The effect of power in modern organizations depend on whether an employee uses the positive or negative type of power to control other employees. There is a focus on developing and using power in an organization because political behavior penetrates organizational life, and it often gives power to people who do not have it from their organizational position. There should be a balance in the use of power and politics in achieving organizational goals and objectives.
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1. Introduction
According to an old saying: "It is not the knowledge or skill you possess, it is about who you know." The power play and politics in an organization is all about being noticed and liked by the right people – 'the powers that be' – to be able to get the right promotions and influence at the right time.

Power may be defined as the ability, capability or right to be able to control people or things. It can also be defined as the political control of a country or a specific area, or an organization or a person that has a lot of influence and/or control over other people or organizations. It is also the ability to influence the flow of the available energy and resources towards certain goals as opposed to other goals.

Power means different things to different people. Power is seen as corrupt for some people, while for others, the more or the greater the power they have, the more successful they always feel; while for others, they have no single interest in it. Power is an important concept, dynamic or variable in the behavior of an organization. It is the enablement to make someone to do things you want done or make something happen in the way you like or want it.

The concept of power needs to be clearly distinguished from influence and authority. Influence is the ability to change the actions of other people in general ways by changing their criteria of satisfaction and therefore improving their performance and productivity. Influence is the outcome of exercising power. It is expressed by other's behavioral response to your exercise of power.

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While authority is the right of directing others and asking them to do things that they would not naturally want to do, but it is legitimate and can be only exercised during the working hours of organizations.

Pfeffer (1992, p.30) defined politics as the processes, the actions, and the behaviors through which potential power is utilized and realized. Organizations are highly political and power is the name of the game. Power and politics must be recognized as an important dynamic in an organization.

Workers have the same ambition in the organization – that is, getting to the peak of their career (i.e. getting to the top of the company). This desire or ambition is not always borne out of financial reasons alone but majorly to get power. Work place politics most times have a negative undertone due to the negative dominant behaviors connected to employees scheming to achieve their aims of getting to the top.

One can make a choice of separating oneself from destructive office politics by separating oneself from people who gossip about other employees and/or others who tend to take credit of work not done by them. Organizational politics can be disruptive when employees go as far as undermining the reputation of each other's office as they compete for one promotion or the other.

2. Organizational Power

According to Max Weber (1947),"Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance."

The acquisition and maintenance of power is one of the most socially motivating processes that occur in modern organizations. Three categories of people are always involved in the power-game of an organization (especially in small and medium enterprises): the owner(s) of the businesses can influence the decision-making process in their favor and also influence promotions of workers. The top level management are also involved in the power-play as they oversee daily activities and have high influence on the decision making of the organization. The third category are the 'top performers.' The company can actually not do without them due to the high productive input they bring into the organization, and that enable them to wield some decision making powers in the organization.

According to John French and Bertram Raven (1959), there are five (5) different types of power in businesses; they are as listed and explained below:

(a) Coercive power: It is the most primordial type of power in a workplace or in an organization. Coercive power takes place when someone in higher authority threatens a subordinate with different punishments if certain tasks or duties is not performed or completed in time and correctly. This power is conveyed through fear of being demoted, losing one's job, or receiving a poor review of performance. It is gotten through threatening others. It is of great importance to know that coercive power is most effectively used in cases where the business is in a serious crisis. It can also be used when there is going to be a cut in personnel due to shift in management and transitions. For example, a Vice President of sales who threatens sales officers to either meets their goals or otherwise gets replaced.

(b) Legitimate power: This power comes from having a position of power in an organization; example is being a boss in the organization or a key member of a leadership team. It exists when subordinates of someone in authority obeys orders given to them because they have the believe that the person is in a position of power to be able to give them such orders. For example, it is the CEO who decides on the overall direction of the company and also determines the resource needs of the organization.

(c) Reward power: subordinates are rewarded and given incentives for carrying out tasks and orders given by a superior. Example of reward power includes promotion, bonuses, increase in salaries, extra-time off from work, public praise, and so on. The main aim of reward power is spurring up subordinates for effectiveness and productivity.

(d) Referent power: this power comes from being respected and trusted. Leaders in the business industry have gained referent power by entrusting their employees with so much tasks and responsibilities in performing their jobs. This type of power is best achieved in the organization when the turnover of the employee is low and also in a work environment where a personal relationship exists.

(e) Expert power: this is a type of power that comes from one's skills, knowledge and experience. People naturally respect and follow those who are experts in a certain field. Subordinates who know that their superior has an expert power feel so relaxed because they believe that he will guide them correctly due to his many experiences.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1979) argues that power is the last dirty word used by Americans. She stated that it is far easy to talk about money and also about sex, than to talk about power. According to her, the effectiveness that power bring evolves from the two types of capacities which are; access to resources and information and support necessary to carry out a task; and ability to get cooperation in doing what is necessary. She assessed the effect that power has on different levels of organization; and according to her, power is derived from three (3) lines which are: lines of supply; lines of information; and lines of support.

Henry Mintzberg theory (1983) was based on the fact that the behavior in an organization is a power game in which there are many players called *Influencers*, who seek to control the actions and decisions of an organization. According to him, there are two groups of influencers which are the internal influencers which consist of techno-structure, support staff, and the ideology of the organization; the second groups are the external influencers which consist of associates, employee association, owners and publics.

J. V. Baldridge (1971) noted that there are many conflicting goals in an organization; and as the balance of power changes among different coalitions, different set of goals become a priority.

2.1 Acquiring and Using Power and Influence

A considerable portion of any manager's time is directed toward power-oriented behavior; which is an action directed at developing or using relationships in which other people are willing to defer wholly or partially to one's wishes.

There are three dimensions of managerial power and influence which are; downward, upward and lateral. Effective managers build and maintain position power and personal power to exercise these downward, upward and lateral influences.

2.2 Building Position and Personal Power

Position power can be built and achieved in three (3) different ways which are listed below:

- ✓ Increasing the centrality and criticality within an organization.
- ✓ Increasing the task importance of own activities and unit's activities.
- ✓ Attempting to define tasks so that they become difficult to evaluate.

Personal power is done building expertise by advanced training and education and also in project involvement; it is also done by learning political savvy and enhancing likeability.

2.3 Behavior of Powerful Leaders and Managers

Powerful leaders and managers in an organization tend to increase the total power of the work group; they also increase the opportunities of their subordinates getting promoted in time. They tend to be highly effective. Some of the behaviors of powerful leaders are listed below:

- They see people's talent as a resource to be harnessed.
- They delegate decision authority.
- They can change people's working conditions.
- They take risk and press for innovations.
- They share power widely and also help people to develop.

2.4 Behavior of Powerless Leaders and Managers

Powerless leaders and managers in an organization are direct opposite of the powerful ones. They tend to lower the total power of the work group; they also decrease the opportunities of their subordinates getting promoted in time. They tend to be highly ineffective. Some of their behaviors are listed below:

- They supervise closely.
- They do not delegate authority to make decisions.
- They often distrust subordinates and see people's talents as a threat.
- They stick to the rules and do not take risks.
- They strongly focus on the work and protect his or her territory.

3. Organizational Politics

Organizational politics can be referred to as the structure and process of use of authority and power to effect definitions of goals, directions and other parameters of the organization.

It can be defined as the management of influence to obtain ends not sanctioned by the organization or to obtain sanctioned ends through non-sanctioned influence means.

Politics is an important function that results from differences in the self-interests of individuals. It is the art of creative compromise or bargain amongst competing interests. It is the use of power to develop socially acceptable ends and means that balance individual and collective interests.

Political behavior is the getting, developing and using of power to reach a desired result. It often appears in situations of uncertainty or conflict over choices. It often happens outside accepted channels of authority. It is an unofficial, unsanctioned behavior to reach a goal.

The use of political behavior is to affect decisions, get scarce resources and earn cooperation of people outside direct authority. The characteristics of political behavior are power and influence.

3.1 Factors that Contributes to Political Behavior in Organizations

According to Morgan (1986, p.142), it is important to know that in its real meaning, the idea of politics arise from the fact that, there are different interests and the society should provide a means to allow individuals to agree their differences by the way of consulting and negotiating. Aristotle put politics as a means of bringing the need for unity in the city-state with the reality that the *polis* was a summation of many members. For him, politics provides a means of creating order out of differences while circumventing forms of an autocratic rule. Political science and diverse government systems have built on this foundational idea, in advocating of politics, and recognizing and interchange of striving regard that implies politics, and as a means to create a non-forceful form of social order.

(Morgan, p.155) Tom Burns who is a Scottish sociologist pointed out that most modern organizations are promoting various kinds of behavior (political) because they are shown as systems of continuous competition and therefore collaboration. There must be collaboration among people in pursuing a common task, but they are yet often made to go against each other in competing for scarce resources and career goal and advancement. Due to the fact that there are more jobs at the bottom when compared to at the top, it means that competing for the top position is likely to be paramount. In addition to the fact that various individuals and groups are commanded to use influence and authority over their subordinates, the pecking order will more or less ensure the kind of competitive grapple on which organizational politics flourishes.

There are different organizational and individual factors that contribute to political behavior in an organization (Dubrin, 2001, p.204-5):

1. Pyramid-shaped organization structure:

A pyramid centralizes power at the top. So much power therefore is obtainable to give out to many people who like more of it (power). Each consecutive layer on the chart of the organization has less power than the layer which is above. Workers have virtually no power at the very bottom of the organization.

2. Subjective standards of performance:

Because people do not believe that the organization has an impartial way of deciding their performance and whether they are suitable for promotion, they resort to organizational politics. Likewise, when managers have no unbiased way of recognizing people who are effective from the less effective, they often utilize the option of favoritism.

3. Environmental uncertainty and turbulence:

People tend to behave politically when they operate in an unstable and unpredictable environment. They depend on organizational politics to make an impression that is favorable

because uncertainty makes it so hard to decide what they should accomplish. The insecurity and uncertainty and turbulence that are created by corporate acquisitions or mergers and/or downsizing is a major factor that is contributing to office politics.

4. Emotional insecurity:

Some people take to political tricks or gimmicks to seek favors from superiors because they have little or no confidence in their expertise and competence.

3.2 Political Implications of Power

The theory of Classical organization presents organization as a rational structure in which authority follows chains of command by which there are legitimized powers conferred on them; whereas non-formal roles of managers and organization shows more pragmatic perspective of the organizations.

In this pragmatic view of organizations, the significance of political aspects of power comes to the fore. In today's organizations, political power game is very real. Like other aspects of the dynamics of an organization, politics is not an easy process; it can differ from one organization to another and also from one sub unit to another sub unit.

Some realities of political power have been pointed out by Walter Nord. He suggests four (4) hypothesis of power in organizations which focuses on the realities of politics.

- Organizations are made up of coalitions which rival with one another for resources, influence and energy.
- Different groups that forms coalitions will strive to protect their stake and influential positions by knowing the pressures and effects of their environment.
- There is a dehumanizing effect in the unequal distribution of power.
- The use of power within various organizations is one very important aspect of exercising power within the larger social system.

Organizational politics has recognized various areas specifically relevant to the degree to which organizations are rather political than rational. These areas are: goals, change, resources, external environment and technology

Today, many organizations are more political. They possess very limited resources; they make ambivalent decisions; have very uncertain but yet complex goals; they have very high complex technology; and are undergoing extreme changes. These types of organizations face more politics and game of power (or power game) becomes rapidly more important.

Conditions that intimidate the prestige of the powerful or support efforts of those willing to expand their base of power will encourage intensity of politics in the organization and raise the rate of behavior in decision making that are as political as against being rational.

3.3 Negative Outcomes of Politics in Modern Organizations and its effects on Productivity

1. *Differences*: Often times, political discussions in the work place develop into different views between two or more groups which can result in splitting a workplace into opposing factions. If this difference is allowed to linger, it will result into low productivity in the work place thereby

affecting the growth of the company. A proactive manager must put a stop to it before getting out of hand.

2. *Discordance*: Different political views or ambitions amongst workers can lead to sharp disagreement in the office which can bring about disharmony in the workplace. And because of different political views, workers may not be able to work together as it affects their effective organizational behaviors. This will in turn bring in low productivity in the organization.

3. *Punitive measures*: A worker who causes division at the work place due to political discussions or ambitions may be given suspension or salary reduction by the management of the organization. This can lead to accusations on the part of the worker who may lay claim to an infringement on his right to 'free speech in a free world' whilst the management may accuse him/her of low performance leading to low productivity. An organization is solely set up for profit making and any distractions due to political views must me adequately nipped in the bud for effective performance and higher productivity.

3.4 Ways in which Political Strategies can be used to Attain Power in Modern Organizations

- Ability to make strategic replacements
- Ability to exhibit confidence
- Controlling access to persons and information
- Formation of a winning coalition
- Ability to develop expertise and build personal stature
- Restriction of communication about actual intentions
- The use of a research data to buttress one's point of view

3.5 How to Limit the Effects of Political Behavior in modern Organizations

- Provision of sufficient resources
- Introducing clear rules
- Measuring performance and not personalities
- Hiring of low-politics employees
- Increasing opportunities for dialogue
- Allow free flow information and open communication.

4. Conclusion

In organizations that can be profit or 'non-profit', effective utilization of the positive types of power and politics cannot be overemphasized because it tells how employees interact positively with each other and controls how decisions are made.

After critically examining the realities of power and politics in modern organizations, it is believed that professionalism and appropriate use of politics in an organization is very vital for a leader in acquiring and retaining power in other to accomplish main goals. And more so, the writer aligns himself with the view of Aristotle who said organizational power and politics can be used to reconcile differences through negotiation and consultation whilst still avoiding abuses.

Despite the fact that power and political behavior may be destructive and highly unethical, it can also be constructively used to achieve certain goals and objectives in the organization, and also create a balance in a diverse set of interests.

For an organization to be highly productive, there should be a balance in the use of power and politics in achieving organizational goals and objectives and these include giving independence to employees to make decisions, compensating employees who put in effective performance in their works and making them (those who put in effective performance) to oversee other employees whilst also developing a political system straightforward for employees to comprehend.

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