

Chapter 16

Power and Politics

Objectives:

To understand:

- The concept of power
- Sources of power
- Interdepartmental power
- Illusion of power
- Political strategies and tactics
- Ethics, power and politics
- Using power to manage effectively.

Power is a pervasive part of organizational life, used by managers to accomplish goals and to strengthen their own positions. Managers manipulate power to accomplish goals and strengthen their own positions. Success or failure in using power depends on understanding what it is, how and when to use it, and understanding its consequences.

The Concept of Power

Power and influence.

Every interaction and social relationship in an organization can be interpreted as an exercise of power. Influence is a transaction in which person B is induced by person A to behave in a certain way. Person A has power over person B to the extent A can get B to do something that B would otherwise not do.

The difference between power and influence is : Power represents capability while Influence is the exercise of that capability. Power is not an attribute; it is an aspect of a relationship.

Contrasting Leadership and Power

Leadership focuses on goal achievement. It requires goal compatibility with followers and focuses influence downward.

Power is used as a means for achieving goals. It requires follower dependency. It is used to gain lateral and upward influence.

Using power.

Obtaining, maintaining, and using power are all essential to influencing behavior. Dependency is the extent to which something person A wants can be effected by person B determines A's dependence on B; B's power over A depends on how much A needs what B controls.

Where Does Power Come From?

A .Interpersonal power—French and Raven's five power bases:

1. Legitimate power—refers to the ability to influence others because of the position one holds in the organization. It is also called authority, or the right to command. Characteristics of organizational authority are: i. It is invested in a person's position.

ii. It is accepted by subordinates. iii. Authority is used vertically; flows from the top down.

Zone of indifference -possessing formal power, or authority, does not mean that all orders will be followed. Orders will be followed if they are acceptable to the subordinate. They lie within the zone of indifference. Unacceptable orders, outside the zone of indifference, will not be readily followed. The zone of indifference may be wider or narrower, depending on sources of power other than authority. It may be shaped by cultural factors.

2. Reward power—based on a person's ability to reward a follower for compliance. It occurs when someone possesses a resource that another person wants and will exchange that resource for certain behavior. It supports legitimate power.

3. Coercive power—the power to punish. It is based on fear. It can come from legitimate. It can come informally, e.g., fear of rejection by coworkers.

4. Expert power—based on an individual's special and valued expertise. The lower the substitutability of the expertise, the greater the expert's power.

5. Referent power—based on an individual's charisma (behavioral style).

Legitimate, reward, and coercive power come from the organization; expertise and referent power reside in the individual and are derived from personal characteristics. One or more of the five bases of power can be used in combination. The use of the type can affect the other power bases (e.g., the use of coercive power can reduce an individual's perceived referent and legitimate power). Research suggests that legitimate and reward powers are positively related; coercive power is negatively related to legitimate and reward power.

B. Power in Groups:

1. ***Coalitions:*** are Clusters of individuals who temporarily come together to achieve a specific purpose. It seeks to maximize their size to attain influence. Coalition seeks a broad and diverse constituency for support of their objectives. It occurs more frequently in organizations with high task and resource inter-dependencies. it also occur more frequently if tasks are standardized and routine.
2. ***Sexual Harassment:*** Unequal Power in the Workplace. Unwelcome advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature in a work environment reasonably perceived as hostile or abusive.

C. Power in Organization

1. ***Structural Power.*** Power is frequently determined by organizational structure. Structure is the control mechanism by which the organization is governed. Structure allocates decision-making discretion to various positions, affects the patterns of communication and the flow in information within a system. Structure creates formal power by specifying certain individuals to perform specific job tasks and make certain decisions.

Other forms of structural power exist because of:

- a. Resources-Power stems from access to resources, information and support and the ability to get cooperation in doing necessary work. A top manager has power over a lower-level manager because he/she controls the lower-level manager's resources.
- b. Decision making power—how much an individual or subunit influences decision-making affects the amount of power acquired.
- c. Information power—power accrues to those with access to important information (the basis for decisions).

2. ***Interdepartmental power*** Subunits/departments can gain power by controlling strategic contingencies—events that are critical in accomplishing organizational goals. Relevant to strategic contingencies, subunit power is influenced by subunit ability to cope with uncertainty, and its centrality and substitutability.

Coping with uncertainty—the three types of coping activities are:

- a. Coping by prevention—reducing the probability that some problem will arise.
- b. Coping by information—using information (e.g., forecasting) to predict if, when, and impact of uncertainties (making them more certain).

- c. Coping by absorption—directly dealing with uncertainty as it impacts the subunit.

Centrality—the degree to which a subunit is central to the organization's workflow (often measured by the degree to which the subunit's work contributes to the organization's final output). Research shows centrality can be a significant source of subunit power. Subunits with centrality substantially affect other units.

Substitutability—the ability of other subunits to perform the activities of a particular subunit. The lower a unit's substitutability, the greater its power.

3. Empowerment Conger and Kanungo define it as "a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information."

Brownwell notes five reasons why empowerment is not universally embraced:

- Managers fear the loss of power, control, and authority.
- Employees are not able to make responsible decisions.
- Empowering employees was attempted before and it failed.
- Sharing proprietary information means leaking ideas, plans, and knowledge to competitors.
- Not everyone wants to be empowered.

Stages of empowerment

- a. Identifying organizational conditions that lead to members' feelings of powerlessness.
- b. Implementation of empowerment strategies, e.g., participative management, and merit pay.
- c. Providing information to subordinates to create feelings of self-efficacy.
- d. Feelings of empowerment by organization members.
- e. Empowerment feelings translate into behaviors.

Empowerment in self managed teams.

Empowerment is fostered two ways in SMTs:

- i. Decision making control is delegated to the team.
- ii. Team members acquire additional skills, knowledge, and experiences.

Power Tactics

Ways in which individuals translate power bases into specific actions

Influence Tactics

- Legitimacy
- Rational persuasion
- Inspirational appeals
- Consultation
- Exchange
- Personal appeals
- Ingratiation
- Pressure
- Coalitions

Preferred Power Tactics by Influence Direction

Upward influence-rational persuasion

Downward influence-rational persuasion,inspirational appeals, pressure, consultation,ingratiation,exchange, legitimacy

Lateral influence-rational persuasion, consultation,ingratiation,exchange,legitimacy,personal appeals, coalition

Factors Influencing the Choice and Effectiveness of Power Tactics

- ***Sequencing of tactics***- Softer to harder tactics work best
- ***Skillful use of a tactic***
- ***Relative power of the tactic user*** -Some tactics work better when applied downward or upward
- ***The type of request attaching to the tactic*** Is the request legitimate? How the request is perceived? Is the request consistent with the target's values?

- **The culture of the organization**-Culture affects user's choice of tactic
- **Country-specific cultural factors**-Local values favor certain tactics over others

Illusion of Power

Some individuals can be perceived as having more power than they really do. They create an illusion of power. Individuals perceived to be powerful could substantially influence others.

Politics: Power in Action

Political Behavior

Activities that are not required as part of one's formal role in the organization, but that influence, or attempt to influence, the distribution of advantages or disadvantages within the organization

Legitimate Political Behavior-Normal everyday politics

Illegitimate Political Behavior-Extreme political behavior that violates the implied rules of the game

Politics Is in the Eye of the Beholder (some examples)

Political label	Effective management label
Blaming others	Fixing responsibility
Kissing up	Developing working relationship
Apple polishing	Demonstrating responsibility
Passing the buck	Delegating authority
Covering your rear	Documenting decisions

Source: Based on T. C. Krell, M. E. Mendenhall, and J. Sendry, "Doing Research in the Conceptual Morass of Organizational Politics," paper presented at the Western Academy of Management Conference, Hollywood, CA, April 1987.

Factors that Influence Political Behaviors

Individual factors-high self monitors, internal locus of control, high Mach personality, Organizational investment, perceived job alternatives, expectation of success

Organizational factors- reallocation of resources, promotion opportunities, low trust, role ambiguity, unclear performance evaluation system, zero-sum reward practices, democratic decision making, high performance pressures, self serving managers.

Political behaviour leads to favourable outcome like rewards and averted punishments.

Employee Responses to Organizational Politics

Perception of organizational politics leads to decreased job satisfaction, increased anxiety and stress, increased turnover and reduced performance.

Political Strategies and Tactics

Politically-oriented behavior (often engaged in by individuals and subunits):

1. Usually lies outside the legitimate power system.
2. Is designed to benefit an individual/subunit often at the organization's expense.
3. Is intentional and designed to acquire/maintain power.

Research on Power

In a study of political behavior of 142 purchasing agents, four primary political tactics were identified:

- a. Rule evasion—evading the formal purchasing procedures.
- b. Personal-political—using friendships to facilitate or inhibit the processing of an order.
- c. Educational—attempting to persuade engineering to think in purchasing terms.
- d. Organizational—trying to change the formal/informal interaction patterns between engineering and purchasing.

In a study of political behavior in the California electronics industry, 87 managers were questioned about organizational political behavior. 13 characteristics were identified as important of which Articulateness, sensitivity, and social adeptness were the leading factors. Though agreement was fairly high among managers, there were some differences depending on their level in the organization, probably because of their different perspectives. Ambitiousness was seen as more important by CEOs than by staff and managers. Being logical was seen as more important by staff and managers than by CEOs.

Playing politics—politics and political behavior exist in every organization.

Game playing—According to Mintzberg, many individuals are adept at playing political games. Mintzberg identifies 13 types of political games played by managers and nonmanagers to accomplish various goals:

- i. To resist authority (the insurgency game).
- ii. To counter the resistance to authority (the counterinsurgency game).
- iii. To build power bases (the sponsorship game and coalition-building game).
- iv. To defeat rivals (the line-versus staff game) and bring about organizational change (the whistle-blowing game).

The insurgency game—played to resist authority (e.g., ordered to reprimand an employee, a foreman does it ineffectively).

Political influence tactics.

Political tactics:

- a. Consultation—seeks support through participation.
- b. Rational persuasion—attempts to show a "logically" best course of action.
- c. Inspirational appeals—appeals to values and ideals.
- d. Ingratiating tactics—designed to make one obligated to another.
- e. Coalition tactics—seeks help of others to persuade you.
- f. Pressure tactics—uses demands, intimidation, or threats to gain support.
- g. Legitimizing—used to gain support by claiming the authority to ask for your support.
- h. Personal Appeals—used to appeal to your feelings of loyalty and friendship in order to gain your support.

Exchange tactics—promises that compliance will lead to rewards.

Some tactics work better in influencing upward, some downward, and some laterally. Managers prefer consultation, rational persuasion, and inspirational appeals. Least appealing were pressure tactics, upward appeals, and exchange tactics.

Defensive Behaviors-reactive and protective behaviours to avoid action, blame or change

Avoiding Action

- Overconforming
- Buck passing
- Playing dumb
- Stretching
- Stalling

Avoiding Blame

- Buffing

- Playing safe
- Justifying
- Scapegoating
- Misrepresenting

Avoiding Change

- Prevention
- Self-protection

Impression management—action taken to control the impressions that other form of an individual. It is an universal phenomenon. Effective impression management can be useful, e.g., in an employment interview. It does not necessarily imply that a false impression is being conveyed. Self-handicapping refers to any action taken in advance of an outcome that is designed to provide either an excuse for failure or a credit for success. It designed to make the best of an as yet undetermined outcome, e.g., the quarterback who says he has a sore arm prior to the game.

Some Impression Management Techniques are:

Conformity Agreeing with someone else's opinion in order to gain his or her approval.

Excuses Explanations of a predicament-creating event aimed at minimizing the apparent severity of the predicament.

Apologies Admitting responsibility for an undesirable event and simultaneously seeking to get a pardon for the action.

Acclamations Explanation of favorable events to maximize the desirable implications for oneself.

Flattery Complimenting others about their virtues in an effort to make oneself appear perceptive and likable.

Favours Doing something nice for someone to gain that person's approval.

Association Enhancing or protecting one's image by managing information about people and things with which one is associated.

Ethics, Power, and Politics

Criteria to be considered in making ethical decisions:

1. Utilitarian outcomes—the greatest good for the greatest number.

2. Individual rights—respect rights of free consent, free speech, freedom of conscience, privacy, and due process.

3. Distributive justice—behave equitably and fairly, not arbitrarily.

When a potential behavior cannot pass the three criteria test, it may still be ethical if it passes the criterion of overwhelming factors: justify behaviors by: 1. Overwhelming factors in the nature of the situation. 2. Conflicts within the criteria 3. Incapacity to employ the first three criteria.

Using Power to Manage Effectively

A. Recognizing that there are multiple interests in virtually every organization.

B. Knowing what position relevant individuals and groups hold with respect to issues important to oneself.

C. Understanding that to get things done one must have power, and in the case of those who oppose, one must have more power than they do.

D. Recognizing the strategies and tactics through which organizational power is developed and used.

Questions

1. Discuss the concept of power. What are the sources of power in an organization-discuss with examples.
2. What is politics? What are the factors that influence political behaviour? Elaborate the Political strategies and tactics prevalent in organization.
3. Discuss the relation between Ethics, power and politics. How can power be used to manage effectively?
4. Write short notes on (a)Defensive techniques (b) Impression Management.