
Assessment of Factors Responsible for Organizational Politics and Its Implications in the Workplace

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Abstract

This seminar paper examined factors responsible for organizational politics and its implications in the workplace. A critical review of previous researches on organizational politics revealed that every organization has a unique political landscape and that quest for equality; promotion and power tussle in organization remain the major factors that incubate and hatch politics in workplace. It was also deduced that political storm in an organization affects both the individual employees and the organization negatively. It was therefore concluded that organizational politics is counter-productive work behaviour and must be minimized to the barest minimum. Based on these findings, it was therefore recommended that both management and employees should set aside their personal interest whiles at the work place. Also, management and employees should have good interpersonal relationship so as to identify the needs of employees and provide them in order to create a peaceful environment, prevent division and conflict between management and employees. Furthermore, the bureaucracy in an organization's political system can be like that of a government agency. Therefore, for a manager to get his ideas implemented he needs to be part of the political process. More importantly, organizations should create committees to conduct research before taking important organizational decisions. Above all, teamwork and employee efficacy is important in order to understand the structure of the organization and therein the politics they choose to employ.

Keywords: Psychology, Politics, Workplace, Organization

Introduction

Employees are the back bone and valuable assets for any organization. Organization will focus on the performance of the employees and the factors which will directly and indirectly affect the performance of the employees. An important factor which affects the performance of an employee at work is perception of organizational politics. Politics is a common phenomenon of almost every organization (Vigoda and Cohen, 2002a). It is unlikely to have a politics free organization because organizations are social entities where employees make efforts individually and in groups for valued resources, struggle for power, involve in conflicts and execute different influential tactics to get the benefits and serve their self interests (Molm, 1997). Therefore, organizational politics is the severe problem which is being faced by the human resource management now a day in both public and private sectors. Organizational politics is the pursuit of individual agendas and self-interest in an organization without regard to their effect on the organizations efforts to achieve its goals (McShane and Von Glinow, 2005).

Perhaps, Organizational politics is the use of power to affect decision making. It is also, when individuals have divergent views about how resources are to be used and mobilized. How rewards are to be distributed as well as how punishments are to be meted out. These opposing views are of a major concern to both employees and managers as they form the major causes of political struggle for resources. The reasons are pragmatic; the extreme forms of illegitimate political behaviour pose a real risk of losing organizational membership or incurring extreme sanctions. Interview with experience managers shows that most people believe political

behaviour is a major part of organizational life. Majority of the managers reported that certain level of political behavior is both ethical and necessary, as long as it does not directly harm anyone (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2007).

Politics is described as a necessary evil and someone who never uses political behaviour will have a hard time achieving goals. Most managers also indicated they had not been trained to use political behaviour effectively (Robins and Judge, 2010). Organizations are made up of people with different values, goal and interest. Due to allocation of limited resources in organization, not everyone's interest can be satisfied. This creates competition among members (Vigoda-Gadot, 2002).

It is an undisputable fact that, over the years organizations have battled with organizational politics and are still putting in all possible efforts to handle this problem so as not to affect the achievement of organizational goals and objectives (Robbins and Judge, 2010). The focus of this research is to identify and rank in the highest order the various political factors in the selected organizations.

Conceptualizing Organizational Politics

The body of literature on organizational politics is expanding but still the research remains distorted with respect to theory and research methodologies adopted. Despite a lot of empirical data, conceptual vagueness still exists. Organizational politics is proved to be fact of life (Vigoda-Gadot, 2000). Regardless of the widespread acceptance of presence of organizational politics proved by empirical research this aspect of life at workplace remained problematic. Before 1970s organizational politics was considered as verboten in the field of management. Organizational politics started getting attention when the concept of organizational rationality was challenged because of the emergence of concepts like person-organization misfit, and incompatibility of personal and organizational goals. The concept of organizational rationality was based on the idea that individuals decide their goals by keeping in view the organizational goals and are expected to work for the achievement of their personal goals according to the rules and regulations of the organization. But a realistic picture of life at workplace showed the existence of conflicting goals within the organization. This existence of conflicting goals in organizations gave birth to organizational politics.

Organizational politics has proved to be a significant part of both public and private organizations, therefore researchers argue for the need of further investigation of the issue (Drory and Romm, 1990; DuBrin, 1988; Mayes and Allen, 1977; Mintzberg, 1983; Parker, Dipboye, and Jackson, 1995; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992). To Zanzi and O'Neill's (2001) definitions of organizational politics fall into two broad categories (cited in Othman, 2008). The first is organizational politics as negative and involves self-serving and unsanctioned behavior. Such behaviors are divisive, illegitimate, dysfunctional and conflict achieving (Gilmore et al, 1996). The second view perceives politics in a more neutral light and accepts that it can sometimes be functional (Kumar and Ghadially, 1989). Pfeffer (1981) for instance, defined politics as a social function that can contribute to the basic functioning of organizations.

Political Landscape in Organization

According to Bolander (2012) political landscape is a set of hierarchies that link the political players together. In other words political landscape is what defines relationships between colleagues at a given time. Drafting of this landscape begins with the leaders of the organization influencing the formal hierarchy; which defines the reporting structure and indicates the political setup of the organization as it was initially intended (Bolander, 2012).

Organizational hierarchies, each with its own unique political challenges, depend on many factors of the given organization. Said factors include organizational goals, size of the organization, number of resources available and the type of leaders within the organization. Political landscape will change as individuals are introduced into the organizational mix. During the process of working together an informal hierarchy is established. The main link between individuals on a political landscape is the access to-in addition to-the flow of information. This hierarchy can be identified by applying numerical values to relationships in proportion to how much two individuals rate and value one another. The sum value of these relating to an individual establishes the place on the hierarchy. Two or more people estimating relationships and merging results can produce more certain results. People quickly realize who the boss is, whom they depend on for valuable information, and who knows all the office gossip. It is very important to recognize where you fit in this landscape and what power and influence you have within the organization (Bolander, 2012). It is important not only to use that power in pursuit of the organization's goals, but also to ensure others do not abuse it. Each player in the organization has a role in the politics that grease the wheels of getting things done.

Factors Responsible for Organizational Politics in The Workplace

There are several factors that are responsible for organizational politics. Among these factors are:

- i. **Equity:** Leaders have to engage in politics to achieve goals. But the litmus test should be why they use politics. If political tactics are used to advance causes in the organization that serve to benefit everyone equally, then they are more likely to be seen as purposeful and legitimate (Simmons, 2009). Power, influence and politics have some effect on every member of an organization and thus on the entire organizational unit. Based on the equity theory (Adams, 1965) and on the idea of social exchange and social reciprocity (Blau, 1964), the motivation to perform better and the development of positive employee attitudes and behaviours, depend on the display of similar positive attitudes and behaviours by other four members of the organization (peers, supervisors, the management and the organizations as a whole). Therefore, many scholars have argued that the relationship between organizational politics and organizational outcomes is an important one that deserves careful and thorough investigation (Ferris and Kacmar, 1991; Kacmar and Carlson, 1997; Zhou and Ferris, 1995) and one that has the potential to enhance our understanding of multiple aspects of performance.
- ii. **Promotion:** According to Robbins and Judge (2010) promotion decisions have consistently been found to be one of the most political actions in organizations. The opportunity for promotion or advancement encourages people to compete for limited resources and try to positively influence the decision outcome. This implies that at the root of office politics is the issue of manipulation. Manipulation can be present in any relationship where one or more of the parties involved uses indirect means to achieve their goals. In the workplace, where resources are limited, individuals often have an incentive to achieve their goals at the expense of their colleagues. For example, if six people apply for one promotion, they might expect the selection to be made purely on merit. If one of the candidates were to believe that this would put them at a disadvantage, they may use other means of coercion or influence to put themselves into an advantageous position. When those who have fallen subject to the manipulation begin to talk to each other directly-or when other evidence comes to light such as financial results-the manipulator will have an explanation ready but will already be planning their exit, as they are driven to stay in control, not to face a revelation which would expose their behaviour.
- iii. **Power:** There is some confusion concerning the proximate terms which are often represented together when organizational politics is discussed. The most commonly used and definitely one of the most important synonymous is "power". It has been widely recognized that both politics and power are significant part of human behaviour as they affect the ability to secure one's goals and interests in a social system. (Vigoda, 2003).

Implications of Organizational Politics in the Workplace

The implications of organizational politics are grouped into two viz; individual and organizational consequences.

- i. **Organizational level consequences:** The impact of organizational politics is very critical in nature. Political behaviours are found to have both functional and dysfunctional effects at organizational levels. Employee involvement in organizational politics affects organizational performance, effectiveness, decision making, and change processes within the organization (Buchanan and Badham, 2007). Studies with narrow definition of organizational politics found it negatively related to performance of organizations (Gotsis and Kortezi, 2010). Madison et al. (1979) found organizational performance to be positively related to the involvement of managers in organizational politics. Managers highly involved in organizational politics were found to be achieving goals with the help of organizational politics. Therefore managerial involvement in organizational politics was proposed to be necessary for the survival of the organization (Madison *et al.*, 1979). Organizational politics is also found to be negatively related to the employee perception about fairness and justice within the organizational setup and processes (Andrews and Kacmar, 2001; Aryee, Chen, and Budhwar, 2004; Beugre and Liverpool, 2006; Ferris *et al.*, 1995).
- ii. **Individual level consequences:** Positive perception about organizational politics is related to satisfaction with job, supervisor, and work environment (Fedor, Maslyn, Farmer and Betternhausen, 2008). Madison et al. (1979) found loss of power, and key position to be the main dysfunctional effects at individual level consequences because of involvement in organizational politics. However stress, dissatisfaction, and anxiety are the other dysfunctional consequences (Miller, Rutherford and Kolodinsky, 2008) of employees

involvement in organizational politics. Individual level consequences also play very important role in the smooth functioning and achievement of organizational goals.

Conclusion

Organizational politics are an unavoidable factor governing the work place. Organizational politics influences organizational behaviour positively or negatively. Negative influences of organizational politics gives rise to hatred, suspicion, lack of trust and promote mediocrity in organization. This implies that companies feel the negative impact of organizational politics more than its positive factors. Therefore, managers should control and coordinate activities within the organization with strategic plans towards achievement of goals and minimize organizational politics factors. Measures should be put in place to curtail the negative effect of organizational politics. Organizational politics when critically managed has its advantages.

Recommendations

- i. Both management and employees should set aside their personal interest whiles at the work place.
- ii. Management and employees should have good interpersonal relationship so as to identify the needs of employees and provide them in order to create a peaceful environment, prevent division and conflict between management and employees.
- iii. The bureaucracy in an organizations political system can be like that of a government agency. Therefore, for a manager to get his ideas implemented he needs to be part of the political process.
- iv. Organizations should create committees to conduct research before taking important organizational decisions.
- v. Teamwork and employee efficacy is important in order to understand the structure of the organization and therein the politics they choose to employ.

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