Organizational Power and Politics
Avoiding Office Politics

Drake International New Zealand has its headquarters in Auckland, but managing director Gary Withers leads the consulting firm from his home in Queenstown, hundreds of kilometres away on the south island. Withers says telecommuting keeps him away from office politics.
The Meaning of Power

Power is the capacity of a person, team, or organization to influence others.

- The potential to influence others
- People have power they don’t use and may not know they possess
- Power requires one person’s perception of dependence on another person
Power and Dependence

Person B’s counterpower over Person A

Person A

Person B

Person A’s power over Person B

Person B’s Goals
Model of Power in Organizations

Sources Of Power
- Legitimate
- Reward
- Coercive
- Expert
- Referent

Contingencies Of Power

Power over Others
The Caine Mutiny illustrates the limits of legitimate power in organizations. Captain Queeg (Humphrey Bogart, seated left) asked his crew to do more than they were willing to follow, so they staged a mutiny.
Information and Power

• Control over information flow
  – Based on legitimate power
  – Relates to formal communication network
  – Common in centralized structures (wheel pattern)

• Coping with uncertainty
  – Those who know how to cope with organizational uncertainties gain power
    • Prevention
    • Forecasting
    • Absorption
Increasing Nonsubstitutability

- Differentiation
- Controlling Tasks
- Controlling Labour
- Controlling Knowledge
Contingencies of Power

Sources Of Power

Contingencies Of Power

Substitutability
Centrality
Discretion
Visibility

Power over others
Consequences of Power

Sources of Power

- Expert Power
- Referent Power
- Legitimate Power
- Reward Power
- Coercive Power

Consequences of Power

- Commitment
- Compliance
- Resistance
Sexual Harassment and Power

- Harasser stereotypes the victim as subservient and powerless
- Harasser threatens job security or safety through coercive or legitimate power
- Hostile work environment harassment continues when the victim lacks power to stop the behaviour
Office Romance and Power

• Co-workers believe that employees in relationships abuse their power to favour each other.

• Higher risk of sexual harassment when relationship breaks off.
Organizational Politics

- Attempts to influence others using discretionary behaviours to promote personal objectives
  - Discretionary behaviours -- neither explicitly prescribed nor prohibited

- Politics may be good or bad for the organization
Types of Organizational Politics

- Managing impressions
- Attacking and blaming
- Creating obligations
- Controlling information
- Cultivating networks
- Forming coalitions
Conditions for Organizational Politics

- Personal Characteristics
- Scarce Resources
- Tolerance of Politics
- Complex and Ambiguous Decisions
Controlling Political Behaviour

- Provide Sufficient Resources
- Introduce Clear Rules
- Free Flowing Information
- Manage Change Effectively

- Remove Political Norms
- Hire Low-Politics Employees
- Increase Opportunities for Dialogue
- Peer Pressure Against Politics
CHAPTER

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