

MPH_AHMR

POWER AND POLITICS IN ORGANIZATIONS

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What is power?

Capacity to influence behavior

- If person A can influence person B to do something that person A wants, we can say that A has power over B.

The origin of power

Power comes from dependence

Dependence refers to control of a resource that is:

- Important
- Scarce
- Difficult to replace (nonsubstitutable)

If person A controls a resource that person B considers important, rare and difficult to substitute, then B is dependent upon A.

Examples: rare earth minerals in the semiconductors market, information and contacts in social networks,...

Power bases 1/2

Formal bases

- Power derives from position in an organization
- Coercive power – power based on the ability to punish non-compliance
- Reward power – power based on the ability to reward compliance
- Legitimate power – power based on respect for a position in the hierarchy

Power bases 2/2

Personal bases

- Power derives from an individual's characteristics
- Expert power – power derived from possession of unique skills, knowledge
- Referent power – power derived from desire of others to associate with the individual (e.g., admired coworkers, movie stars,...)

Power tactics 1/2

Means of translating powerbase into specific behavior:

- Legitimacy – rely on authority of position or on formal rules
- Rational persuasion – rely on logical arguments and facts
- Inspirational appeals – leverage the target's values and norms
- Consultation – involve the target in deciding how your goal should be achieved

Power tactics 2/2

Means of translating powerbase into specific behavior:

- Exchange – reward compliance with favors or compensation
- Personal appeal – leverage friendship with target
- Ingratiation – use flattery and friendly behavior to convince
- Pressure – warnings, demands, threats
- Coalition – team up with others to convince target

Effects of power

Power gives people the means to act in their own interest

- This may lead to abuse of power
- Less likely in certain personalities (e.g., anxious)
- Effect may be reduced by some structural arrangements (e.g., ensure accountability, don't make people feel threatened)

Abuse of power: sexual harassment

Unwanted activity of a sexual nature which creates a hostile work environment

To prevent:

- Clear definition of sexual harassment and its consequences for the aggressor
- Make it safe to report sexual harassment
- Investigate complaints
- Punish perpetrators
- Raise awareness

Organizational politics

Use of power to affect decision-making to reach a goal

Political behavior

- Activities not required by an individual's formal role, which attempt to influence the distribution of advantages in an organization
- Use of power bases and tactics

Politics are inevitable in organizations

Causes of political behavior

Individual factors

- certain personality traits and belief in own ability to affect decision-making
- Degree of investment in the organization
- Job alternatives

Organizational factors

- Resource scarcity
- Organizational culture (e.g., zero sum approach, low trust)
- Unclear reward systems, role ambiguity

Consequences of political behavior

Employees may feel threatened by organizational politics:

- Decreased job satisfaction
- Increased anxiety, stress
- Increased turnover
- Reduced performance

These effects are more intense in employees who are not confident in political behavior

Impression management

An individual's attempts to influence others' opinions about him/her

- Changes in posture, clothing, accent, etc.
- Adopting specific mannerisms, behaviors

May create a reputation, convince others that individual has power

Thank you for your attention

Source (read more): Robbins, S.P. & Judge, T.A. (2013) *Organizational behavior*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.