



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Power and Politics

Organizations can be seen as political arenas that house a complex variety of individual and group interests. Five propositions that summarize organizational politics are:

1. Organizations are coalitions composed of varied individuals and groups.
2. There are enduring differences among individuals and groups with regards to values, preferences, beliefs, information and perceptions of reality.
3. Most important decisions in organizations involve the allocation of scarce resources.
4. Conflict is central to organizational dynamics, and power is the most important resource.
5. Organizational goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among members of different coalitions

Power is a measurement of a person's potential to get others to do what he or she wants them to do, as well as to avoid being forced by others to do what he or she does not want to do.

Sources of power

Organizational sources of power include:

- Coercive power - the capacity to provide reward
- Reward power - the capacity to punish
- Legitimate power - position in organizational hierarchy

Personal sources include:

- Expert power - skill, expertise and knowledge
- Referent power - personal characteristics of a person that make other people want to associate with them
- Leadership power - effective leadership in an organization creates a vision of the future that considers the long-term interests of the parties involved. One should understand the relationship between power, authority, and leadership

Authority is the right to issue directives and expend resources. It is related to power but narrower in scope. Basically, authority depends on the amount of coercive, reward, and legitimate power one can exert. An individual can have expert power or referent power without having formal authority.

Leadership is the ability to influence people to willingly follow one's guidance or adhere to one's decisions. Gaining followers and influencing them in the setting and achieving of objectives makes a leader.



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Leaders use power to influence group behavior. Leadership has to cope with politics that often cause disturbances within the organization. Here are a few suggestions for managers to use in coping with organizational politics.

General suggestions

"Coping with Attila the Hun." If an employee loses his/her temper or becomes verbally abusive, keep your cool and don't allow yourself to become hostile. Try to leave the scene professionally and diplomatically. Uncontrolled emotions will harm your image in the company.

"Dress for success." Be aware that your appearance and demeanor reveal a great deal about you. If you want to gain respect and be seen as a prime time player, strive to look and act professional in all circumstances.

Realize that office politics is a game. Try to identify the main players and what motivates them. You'll begin to notice a repetitive pattern to their moves.

Don't burn bridges, don't intimidate superiors, don't attempt to make others look bad, don't discuss personal problems and don't oversell yourself.

Do keep employer's perspectives in mind, be pleasant, be assertive and tough when required, and force yourself to do difficult, uncomfortable things.

Suggestions to employees

Spend time to understand the structure and traditions of the company.

Find a mentor who will be able to steer you through the political maze.

Be aware of people who are trying to sabotage you because they feel that you are a threat to them. Confront them in private.

"Social Savvy." Avoid bad-mouthing anyone. You never know how information may get back to the person being talked about.

Make an effort to learn about diversity, communication techniques and management techniques.