

13

Power and Politics in Organizations

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Contrast leadership and power.
2. Explain the three bases of formal power and the two bases of personal power.
3. Explain the role of dependence in power relationships.
4. Identify power or influence tactics and their contingencies.
5. Identify the causes and consequences of abuse of power.
6. Describe how politics work in organizations.
7. Identify the causes, consequences, and ethics of political behavior.

★ Chapter Warm-up

If your professor has chosen to assign this, go to the Assignments section of mymanagementlab.com to complete the chapter warm-up.

★ WATCH IT

If your professor has assigned this, go to the Assignments section of mymanagementlab.com to complete the video exercise titled **Power and Political Behavior**.

Power

A capacity that A has to influence the behavior of B so that B acts in accordance with A's wishes.

Dependence

B's relationship to A when A possesses something that B requires.

POWER AND LEADERSHIP

We often talk about power abstractly—with either respect, pride, or deference. In organizational behavior (OB), **power** simply refers to a capacity that A has to influence the behavior of B so B acts in accordance with A's wishes.¹ Someone can thus have power but not use it; it is a capacity or potential. Probably the most important aspect of power is that it is a function of **dependence**. The greater B's dependence on A, the greater A's power in the relationship. Dependence, in turn, is based on alternatives that B perceives and the importance B places on the alternative(s) A controls. A person can have power over you only if he or she controls something you desire. If you want a college degree and have to pass a certain course to get it, and your current instructor is the only faculty member in the college who teaches that course, she has power over you because your alternatives are highly limited and you place a high degree of importance on the outcome. Similarly, if you're attending college on funds provided by your parents, you probably recognize the power they hold over you. But once you're out of school, have a job, and are making a good income; your parents' power is reduced significantly.

A careful comparison of our description of power with our description of leadership in Chapter 12 reveals that the concepts are closely intertwined. *Leaders* use *power* as a means of attaining group goals. How are the two terms different? Power does not require goal compatibility, just dependence. Leadership, on the other hand, requires some congruence between the goals of the leader and those being led. A second difference relates to the direction of influence. Leadership research focuses on the downward influence on followers. It minimizes the importance of lateral and upward influence patterns. Power research takes all factors into consideration. For a third difference, leadership research often emphasizes style. It seeks answers to questions such as: How supportive should a leader be? How much decision making should be shared with followers? In contrast, the research on power focuses on tactics for gaining compliance. Lastly, leadership concentrates on the individual leader's influence, while the study of power acknowledges that groups as well as individuals can use power to control other individuals or groups.

You may have noted that for a power situation to exist, one person or group needs to have control over resources the other person or group values. This is usually the case in established leadership situations. However, power relationships are possible in all areas of life, and power can be obtained in many ways. Let's explore the various sources of power next.

BASES OF POWER

Where does power come from? What gives an individual or a group influence over others? We answer by dividing the bases or sources of power into two general groupings, formal and personal, and breaking each of these down into more specific categories.²

Formal Power

Formal power is based on an individual's position in an organization. It can come from the ability to coerce or reward, or from formal authority.

Coercive power

A power base that is dependent on fear of the negative results from failing to comply.

COERCIVE POWER The **coercive power** base depends on the target's fear of negative results from failing to comply. On the physical level, coercive power rests on the application, or the threat of application, of bodily distress through the infliction of pain, the restriction of movement, or the withholding of basic physiological or safety needs.

At the organizational level, *A* has coercive power over *B* if *A* can dismiss, suspend, or demote *B*, assuming *B* values the job. If *A* can assign *B* work activities *B* finds unpleasant, or treat *B* in a manner *B* finds embarrassing, *A* possesses coercive power over *B*. Coercive power comes also from withholding key information. People in an organization who have data or knowledge others need can make others dependent on them.

REWARD POWER The opposite of coercive power is **reward power**, with which people comply because it produces positive benefits; someone who can distribute rewards others view as valuable will have power over them. These rewards can be financial—such as controlling pay rates, raises, and bonuses—or nonfinancial, including recognition, promotions, interesting work assignments, friendly colleagues, and preferred work shifts or sales territories.³

Reward power
Compliance achieved based on the ability to distribute rewards that others view as valuable.

LEGITIMATE POWER In formal groups and organizations, probably the most common access to one or more of the power bases is through **legitimate power**. It represents the formal authority to control and use organizational resources based on the person's structural position in the organization.

Legitimate power
The power a person receives as a result of his or her position in the formal hierarchy of an organization.

Legitimate power is broader than the power to coerce and reward. Specifically, it includes members' acceptance of the authority of a hierarchical position. We associate power so closely with the concept of hierarchy that just drawing longer lines in an organization chart leads people to infer the leaders are especially powerful.⁴ In general, when school principals, bank presidents, or army captains speak; teachers, tellers, and first lieutenants usually comply.

Personal Power

Many of the most competent and productive chip designers at Intel have power, but they aren't managers and they have no formal power. What they have is *personal power*, which comes from an individual's unique characteristics. There are two bases of personal power: expertise and the respect and admiration of others. Personal power is not mutually exclusive from formal power, but it can be independent.

EXPERT POWER **Expert power** is influence wielded as a result of expertise, special skills, or knowledge. As jobs become more specialized, we become dependent on experts to achieve goals. It is generally acknowledged that physicians have expertise and hence expert power: most of us follow our doctor's advice. Computer specialists, tax accountants, economists, industrial psychologists, and other specialists wield power as a result of their expertise.

Expert power
Influence based on special skills or knowledge.

REFERENT POWER **Referent power** is based on identification with a person who has desirable resources or personal traits. If I like, respect, and admire you; you can exercise power over me because I want to please you.

Referent power
Influence based on identification with a person who has desirable resources or personal traits.

Referent power develops out of admiration of another and a desire to be like that person. It helps explain, for instance, why celebrities are paid millions of dollars to endorse products in commercials. Marketing research shows people such as LeBron James and Tom Brady have the power to influence your choice of athletic shoes and credit cards. With a little practice, you and I could probably deliver as smooth a sales pitch as these celebrities, but the buying public doesn't identify with us. Some people who are not in formal leadership positions have referent power and exert influence over others because of their charismatic dynamism, likability, and emotional appeal.

Which Bases of Power Are Most Effective?

Of the three bases of formal power (coercive, reward, legitimate) and two bases of personal power (expert, referent), which are most important? Research suggests the personal sources of power are most effective. Both expert and referent power are positively related to employees' satisfaction with supervision, their organizational commitment, and their performance, whereas reward and legitimate power seem to be unrelated to these outcomes. One source of formal power, coercive power, can be damaging.

Referent power can be a powerful motivator. Consider Steve Stoute's company, Translation, which matches pop-star spokespersons with corporations that want to promote their brands. Stoute has paired Justin Timberlake with McDonald's, Beyoncé with Tommy Hilfiger, and Jay-Z with Reebok. Stoute's business seems to be all about referent power. The success of these well-known companies attests to Stoute's expectation that the buying public identifies with and emulates his spokespersons and therefore thinks highly of the brands they represent. Stoute's business seems to be all about referent power, using the credibility of artists and performers to reach youth culture.⁵

DEPENDENCE: THE KEY TO POWER

The most important aspect of power is that it is a function of dependence. In this section, we show how understanding dependence helps us understand degrees of power.

The General Dependence Postulate

Let's begin with a general postulate: *The greater B's dependence on A, the more power A has over B.* When you possess anything others require that you alone control, you make them dependent on you, and therefore you gain power over them.⁶ As the old saying goes, "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king!" But if something is plentiful, possessing it will not increase your power. Therefore, the more you can expand your own options, the less power you place in the hands of others. This explains why most organizations develop multiple suppliers rather than give their business to only one. It also explains why so many people aspire to financial independence. Independence reduces the power others can wield to limit our access to opportunities and resources.

What Creates Dependence?

Dependence increases when a resource you control is important, scarce, and nonsubstitutable.⁷

IMPORTANCE If nobody wants what you have, it's not going to create dependence. However, note that there are many degrees of importance, from needing the resource for survival to wanting a resource that is in fashion or adds to convenience.

SCARCITY We see the scarcity-dependence relationship in the power situation of employment. When the supply of labor is low relative to demand, workers can negotiate compensation and benefits packages that are far more attractive than those in occupations with an abundance of candidates. For example, college administrators have no problem today finding English instructors since there is a high supply and low demand. The market

for network systems analysts, in contrast, is comparatively tight, with demand high and supply limited. The resulting bargaining power of computer-engineering faculty allows them to negotiate higher salaries, lighter teaching loads, and other benefits.

NONSUBSTITUTABILITY The fewer viable substitutes for a resource, the more power a person controlling that resource has. At universities that value faculty publishing, for example, the more recognition the faculty member receives through publication, the more control that person has because other universities also want faculty who are highly published and visible.

Social Network Analysis: A Tool for Assessing Resources

One tool to assess the exchange of resources and dependencies within an organization is *social network analysis*.⁸ This method examines patterns of communication among organizational members to identify how information flows between them. Within a social network, or connections between people who share professional interests, each individual or group is called a node, and the links between nodes are called ties. When nodes communicate or exchange resources frequently, they are said to have very strong ties. Other nodes that are not engaged in direct communication with one another achieve resource flows through intermediary nodes. In other words, some nodes act as brokers between otherwise unconnected nodes. A graphical illustration of the associations among individuals in a social network is called a *sociogram*, which functions like an informal version of an organization chart. The difference is that a formal organization chart shows how authority is supposed to flow, whereas a sociogram shows how resources *really* flow in an organization. An example of a sociogram is shown in Exhibit 13-1.

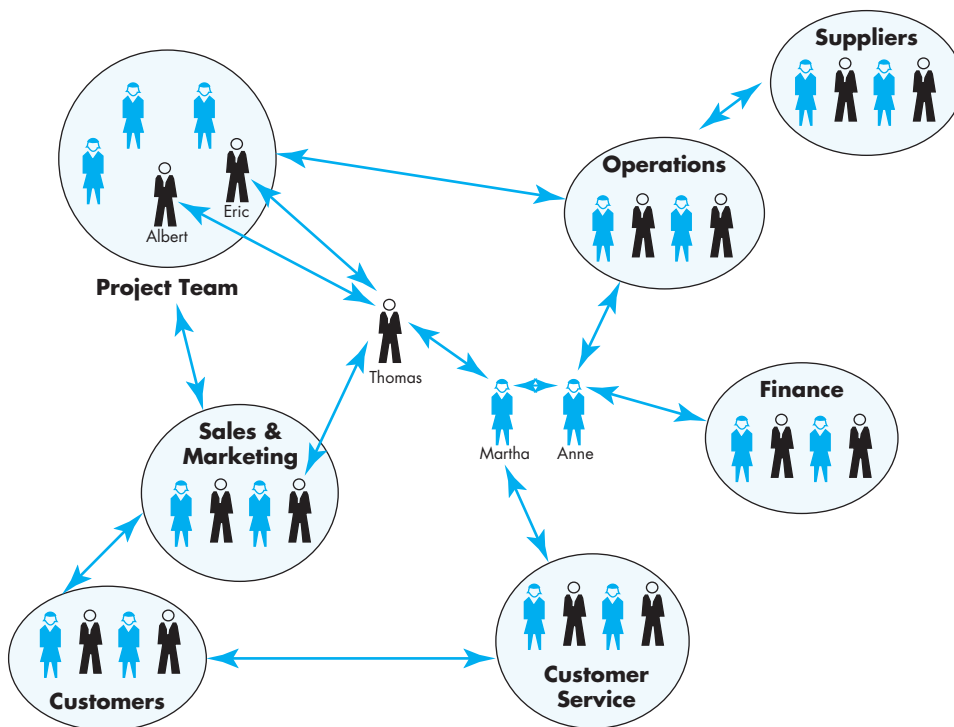


EXHIBIT 13-1
Example of a
Sociogram



Networks can create substantial power dynamics. Those in the position of brokers tend to have more power because they can leverage the unique resources they can acquire from different groups. In other words, many people are dependent upon brokers, which gives the brokers more power. For example, organizational culture changes such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) awareness will often begin in a single connected group of individuals, grow in strength, and slowly move to other connected groups through brokers over time.⁹ Data from the United Kingdom's National Health Service shows that change agents, people entrusted with helping an organization to make a significant change, have more success if they are information brokers.¹⁰ These functions are not without cost, however. One study found that people identified as central to advice networks were more likely to quit their jobs, possibly because they did a great deal of extra work without reward.¹¹

There are many ways to implement a social network analysis in an organization.¹² Some organizations keep track of the flow of e-mail communications or document sharing across departments. These big data tools are an easy way to gather objective information about how individuals exchange information. Other organizations look at data from human resources (HR) information systems, analyzing how supervisors and subordinates interact with one another. These data sources can produce sociograms showing how resources and power flow. Leaders can then identify powerful brokers who exert the strongest influence on many groups, and address these key individuals.

POWER TACTICS

Power tactics

Ways in which individuals translate power bases into specific actions.

What **power tactics** do people use to translate power bases into specific action? What options do they have for influencing their bosses, coworkers, or employees? Research has identified nine distinct influence tactics:¹³

- **Legitimacy.** Relying on your authority position or saying a request accords with organizational policies or rules.
- **Rational persuasion.** Presenting logical arguments and factual evidence to demonstrate a request is reasonable.
- **Inspirational appeals.** Developing emotional commitment by appealing to a target's values, needs, hopes, and aspirations.
- **Consultation.** Increasing support by involving the target in deciding how to accomplish your plan.
- **Exchange.** Rewarding the target with benefits or favors in exchange for acceding to a request.
- **Personal appeals.** Asking for compliance based on friendship or loyalty.
- **Ingratiation.** Using flattery, praise, or friendly behavior prior to making a request.
- **Pressure.** Using warnings, repeated demands, and threats.
- **Coalitions.** Enlisting the aid or support of others to persuade the target to agree.

Using Power Tactics

Some tactics are more effective than others. Rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, and consultation tend to be the most effective, especially when the audience is highly interested in the outcomes of a decision process. The pressure tactic tends to backfire and is typically the least effective of the nine.¹⁴ You can increase your chance of success by using two or

more tactics together or sequentially, as long as your choices are compatible.¹⁵ Using ingratiation and legitimacy together can lessen negative reactions, but only when the audience does not really care about the outcome of a decision process or the policy is routine.¹⁶

Let's consider the most effective way of getting a raise. You can start with a rational approach—figure out how your pay compares to that of your organizational peers, land a competing job offer, gather data that testify to your performance, or use salary calculators like Salary.com to compare your pay with others in your occupation—then share your findings with your manager. The results can be impressive. Kitty Dunning, a vice president at Don Jagoda Associates, landed a 16 percent raise when she e-mailed her boss numbers showing she had increased sales.¹⁷

While rational persuasion may work in this situation, the effectiveness of some influence tactics depends on the direction of influence,¹⁸ and of course on the audience. As Exhibit 13-2 shows, rational persuasion is the only tactic effective across organizational levels. Inspirational appeals work best as a downward-influencing tactic with subordinates. When pressure works, it's generally downward only. Personal appeals and coalitions are most effective as lateral influence. Other factors relating to the effectiveness of influence include the sequencing of tactics, a person's skill in using the tactic, and the organizational culture.

In general, you're more likely to be effective if you begin with "softer" tactics that rely on personal power, such as personal and inspirational appeals, rational persuasion, and consultation. If these fail, you can move to "harder" tactics, such as exchange, coalitions, and pressure, which emphasize formal power and incur greater costs and risks.¹⁹ A single soft tactic is more effective than a single hard tactic, and combining two soft tactics or a soft tactic and rational persuasion is more effective than any single tactic or combination of hard tactics.²⁰

As we mentioned, the effectiveness of tactics depends on the audience.²¹ People especially likely to comply with soft power tactics tend to be more reflective and intrinsically motivated; they have high self-esteem and a greater desire for control. Those likely to comply with hard power tactics are more action-oriented and extrinsically motivated, and are more focused on getting along with others than on getting their own way.

Cultural Preferences for Power Tactics

Preference for power tactics varies across cultures.²² Those from individualistic countries tend to see power in personalized terms and as a legitimate means of advancing their personal ends, whereas those in collectivistic countries see power in social terms and as a legitimate means of helping others.²³ Managers in the United States seem to prefer rational appeal, whereas Chinese managers may prefer coalition tactics.²⁴ Reason-based tactics are consistent with the U.S. preference for direct confrontation, and rational persuasion to influence others and resolve differences, while coalition tactics align with the Chinese preference for meeting difficult or controversial requests with indirect approaches.

ZTE corporation
Building relationships with government organizations and other institutions is critical in China. Zhongxing Telecommunication Equipment Co. Ltd. (ZTE) is a global provider of integrated telecommunication solutions. One of the corporation's founders and past Chairman, the legendary Hou Weigui, worked to free the company from state or collectivist management. His low-key, mild, and practical management style became the image of ZTE for most people.



Upward Influence	Downward Influence	Lateral Influence
Rational persuasion	Rational persuasion Inspirational appeals Pressure Consultation Ingratiation Exchange Legitimacy	Rational persuasion Consultation Ingratiation Exchange Legitimacy Personal appeals Coalitions

EXHIBIT 13-2
Preferred Power Tactics by Influence Direction

Political skill

The ability to influence others in such a way as to enhance one's objectives.



Applying Power Tactics

People differ in their **political skill**, or their ability to influence others to enhance their own objectives. The politically skilled are more effective users of all the influence tactics. Political skill is also more effective when the stakes are high, such as when the individual is accountable for important organizational outcomes. Finally, the politically skilled are able to exert their influence without others detecting it, a key element in effectiveness (it's damaging to be labeled political).²⁵ These individuals are able to use their political skills in environments with low levels of procedural and distributive justice. When an organization has fairly applied rules, free of favoritism or biases, political skill is actually negatively related to job performance ratings.²⁶

Lastly, we know cultures within organizations differ markedly; some are warm, relaxed, and supportive; others are formal and conservative. Some encourage participation and consultation, some encourage reason, and still others rely on pressure. People who fit the culture of the organization tend to obtain more influence.²⁷ Specifically, extraverts tend to be more influential in team-oriented organizations, and highly conscientious people are more influential in organizations that value working alone on technical tasks. People who fit the culture are influential because they can perform especially well in the domains deemed most important for success. Thus, the organization itself will influence which subset of power tactics is viewed as acceptable for use.

HOW POWER AFFECTS PEOPLE

To this point, we've discussed what power is and how it is acquired. But we've not yet answered one important question: does power corrupt?

There is certainly evidence that there are corrupting aspects of power. Power leads people to place their own interests ahead of others' needs or goals. Why does this happen? Interestingly, power not only leads people to focus on their self-interests because they can, it also liberates them to focus inward and thus come to place greater weight on their own aims and interests. Power also appears to lead individuals to "objectify" others (to see them as tools to obtain their instrumental goals) and to see relationships as more peripheral.²⁸

That's not all. Powerful people react—especially negatively—to any threats to their competence. People in positions of power hold on to it when they can, and individuals who face threats to their power are exceptionally willing to take actions to retain it whether their actions harm others or not. Those given power are more likely to make self-interested decisions when faced with a moral hazard (such as when hedge fund managers take more risks with other people's money because they're rewarded for gains but punished less often for losses). People in power are more willing to denigrate others. Power also leads to overconfident decision making.²⁹

Power Variables

As we've discussed, power does appear to have some important disturbing effects on us. But that is hardly the whole story—power is more complicated than that. It doesn't affect everyone in the same way, and there are even positive effects of power. Let's consider each of these in turn.

First, the toxic effects of power depend on the wielder's personality. Research suggests that if you have an anxious personality, power does not corrupt you because you are less likely to think that using power benefits yourself.³⁰ Second, the corrosive effect of power can be contained by organizational systems. For example, one study found that while power made people behave in a self-serving manner, the self-serving behavior stopped when accountability for the behavior was initiated. Third, we have the means to blunt the negative effects of power. One study showed that simply expressing gratitude toward powerful others makes them less likely to act aggressively against us. Finally, remember the saying that those with little power abuse what little they have? There seems to be some truth to this in that the people most likely to abuse power are those who start low in status and gain power. Why is this the case? It appears that having low status is threatening, and the fear this creates is used in negative ways if power is given later.³¹

As you can see, some factors can moderate the negative effects of power. But there can also be general positive effects. Power energizes and increases motivation to achieve goals. It also can enhance our motivation to help others. One study found, for example, that a desire to help others translated into actual work behavior when people felt a sense of power.³²

This study points to an important insight about power. It is not so much that power corrupts as it *reveals what we value*. Supporting this line of reasoning, another study found that power led to self-interested behavior only in those with a weak moral identity (the degree to which morals are core to someone's identity). In those with a strong moral identity, power enhanced their moral awareness and willingness to act.³³

Sexual Harassment: Unequal Power in the Workplace

Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted activity of a sexual nature that affects an individual's employment or creates a hostile work environment. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), sexual harassment happens when a person encounters "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature" on the job that disrupts work performance or that creates an "intimidating, hostile, or offensive" work environment.³⁴ Although the definition changes from country to country, most nations have at least some policies to protect workers. Whether the policies or laws are followed is another question, however. Equal employment opportunity legislation is established in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Oman, for example, but studies suggest it might not be well implemented.³⁵

Generally, sexual harassment is more prevalent in male-dominated societies. For example, a study in Pakistan found that up to 93 percent of female workers were sexually harassed.³⁶ In Singapore, up to 54 percent of workers (women and men) reported they were sexually harassed.³⁷ The percentages in the United States and some other countries are generally much lower but still troubling. Surveys indicate about one-quarter of U.S. women and 10 percent of men have been sexually harassed.³⁸ Data from the EEOC suggest that sexual harassment is decreasing: sexual harassment claims now make up 10 percent of all discrimination claims, compared with 20 percent in the mid-1990s. Of this percentage, though, claims from men have increased from 11 percent of total claims in 1997 to 17.5 percent today.³⁹ Sexual harassment is disproportionately prevalent for women in certain types of jobs. In the restaurant industry, for instance, 80 percent of female waitstaff in a study reported having been sexually harassed by coworkers or customers, compared to 70 percent of male waitstaff.⁴⁰

Sexual harassment
Any unwanted activity of a sexual nature that affects an individual's employment and creates a hostile work environment.





The bottom line is that managers have a responsibility to protect their employees from a hostile work environment. They may easily be unaware that one of their employees is being sexually harassed, but being unaware does not protect them or their organization. If investigators believe a manager could have known about the harassment, both the manager and the company can be held liable.

POLITICS: POWER IN ACTION

Whenever people get together in groups, power will be exerted. People in organizations want to carve out a niche to exert influence, earn rewards, and advance their careers. If they convert their power into action, we describe them as being engaged in *politics*. Those with good political skills have the ability to use their bases of power effectively.⁴¹ Politics are not only inevitable; they might be essential, too.

Definition of Organizational Politics

There is no shortage of definitions of *organizational politics*. Essentially, this type of politics focuses on the use of power to affect decision making in an organization, sometimes for self-serving and organizationally unsanctioned behaviors.⁴² For our purposes, **political behavior** in organizations consists of activities that are not required as part of an individual's formal role but that influence, or attempt to influence, the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organization.⁴³

This definition encompasses what most people mean when they talk about organizational politics. Political behavior is outside specified job requirements. It requires some attempt to use power bases. It includes efforts to influence the goals, criteria, or processes used for decision making. Our definition is broad enough to include varied political behaviors such as withholding key information from decision makers, joining a coalition, whistle-blowing, spreading rumors, leaking confidential information to the media, exchanging favors with others for mutual benefit, and lobbying on behalf of or against a particular individual or decision alternative. In this way, political behavior is often negative, but not always.

The Reality of Politics

Interviews with experienced managers show most believe political behavior is a major part of organizational life.⁴⁴ Many managers report some use of political behavior is ethical, as long as it doesn't directly harm anyone else. They describe politics as necessary and believe someone who never uses political behavior will have a hard time getting things done. Most also indicate they have never been trained to use political behavior effectively. But why, you may wonder, must politics exist? Isn't it possible for an organization to be politics-free? It's *possible*—if all members of that organization hold the same goals and interests, if organizational resources are not scarce, and if performance outcomes are completely clear and objective. But that doesn't describe the organizational world in which most of us live.

Maybe the most important factor leading to politics within organizations is the realization that most of the "facts" used to allocate limited resources are open to interpretation. When allocating pay based on performance, for instance, what is *good* performance? What's an *adequate* improvement? What constitutes an *unsatisfactory* job? The manager

Political behavior

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

of any major league baseball team knows a .400 hitter is a high performer and a .125 hitter is a poor performer. You don't need to be a baseball genius to know you should play your .400 hitter and send the .125 hitter back to the minors. But what if you have to choose between players who hit .280 and .290? Then less objective factors come into play: fielding expertise, attitude, potential, ability to perform in a clutch, loyalty to the team, and so on. More managerial decisions resemble the choice between a .280 and a .290 hitter than between a .125 hitter and a .400 hitter. It is in this large and ambiguous middle ground of organizational life—where the facts don't speak for themselves—that politics flourish.

Finally, because most decisions have to be made in a climate of ambiguity—where facts are rarely objective and thus open to interpretation—people within organizations will use whatever influence they can to support their goals and interests. That, of course, creates the activities we call *politicking*. One person's "selfless effort to benefit the organization" is seen by another as a "blatant attempt to further his or her interest."⁴⁵

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

Now that we've discussed the constant presence of politicking in organizations, let's discuss the causes and consequences of these behaviors.

Factors Contributing to Political Behavior

Not all groups or organizations are equally political. In some organizations, politicking is overt and rampant, while in others politics play a small role in influencing outcomes. What causes this variation? Research and observation have identified a number of factors that appear to encourage political behavior. Some are individual characteristics, derived from the qualities of the people the organization employs; others are a result of the organization's culture or internal environment. Exhibit 13-3 illustrates how both individual and organizational factors can increase political behavior and provide favorable outcomes (increased rewards and averted punishments) for individuals and groups in the organization.

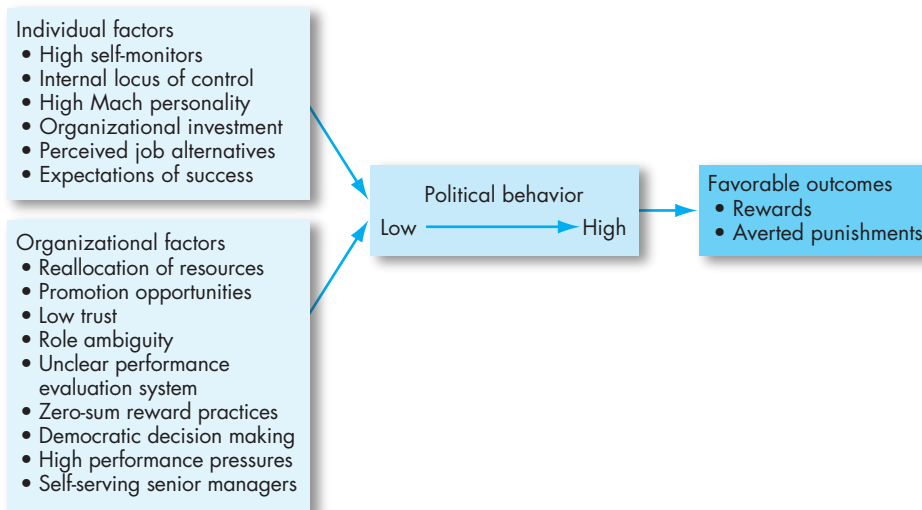


EXHIBIT 13-3
Antecedents and
Outcomes of
Political Behavior

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS At the individual level, researchers have identified certain personality traits, needs, and other factors likely to be related to political behavior. In terms of traits, we find that employees who are high self-monitors, possess an internal locus of control, and have a high need for power (nPow; see Chapter 7) are more likely to engage in political behavior. The high self-monitor is more sensitive to social cues, exhibits higher levels of social conformity, and is more likely to be skilled in political behavior than the low self-monitor. Because they believe they can control their environment, individuals with an internal locus of control are more prone to take a proactive stance and attempt to manipulate situations in their favor. Not surprisingly, the Machiavellian personality (see Chapter 4)—characterized by the will to manipulate and the desire for power—is consistent with using politics as a means to further personal interests.

An individual's investment in the organization and perceived alternatives influence the degree to which he or she will pursue illegitimate means of political action.⁴⁶ The more a person expects increased future benefits from the organization, and the more that person has to lose if forced out, the less likely he or she is to use illegitimate means. Conversely, the more alternate job opportunities an individual has—due to a favorable job market, possession of scarce skills or knowledge, prominent reputation, or influential contacts outside the organization—the more likely the person is to employ politics.



Finally, some individuals engage in political behavior simply because they are better at it. Such individuals read interpersonal interactions well, fit their behavior to situational needs, and excel at networking.⁴⁷ These people are often indirectly rewarded for their political efforts. For example, a study of a construction firm in southern China found that politically skilled subordinates were more likely to receive recommendations for rewards from their supervisors, and politically oriented supervisors were especially likely to respond positively to politically skilled subordinates.⁴⁸ Other studies from countries around the world have similarly shown that higher levels of political skill are associated with higher levels of perceived job performance.⁴⁹

ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS Although we acknowledge the role individual differences can play, the evidence more strongly suggests that certain situations and cultures promote politics. Specifically, when an organization's resources are declining, when the existing pattern of resources is changing, and when there is opportunity for promotions, politicking is more likely to surface.⁵⁰ When resources are reduced, people may engage in political actions to safeguard what they have. Also, *any* changes, especially those implying a significant reallocation of resources within the organization, are likely to stimulate conflict and increase politicking.

Cultures characterized by low trust, role ambiguity, unclear performance evaluation systems, win-lose reward allocation practices, democratic decision making, high pressure for performance, and self-serving senior managers will create breeding grounds for politicking.⁵¹ Because political activities are not required as part of the employee's formal role, the greater the role ambiguity, the more employees can engage in unnoticed political activity. Role ambiguity means the prescribed employee behaviors are not clear. In this situation, there are fewer limits to the scope and functions of the employee's political actions.

THE ZERO-SUM APPROACH The more an organizational culture emphasizes the zero-sum or win–lose approach to reward allocations, the more employees will be motivated to engage in politicking. The **zero-sum approach** treats the reward “pie” as fixed, so any gain one person or group achieves comes at the expense of another person or group. For example, if \$15,000 is distributed among five employees for raises, any employee who gets more than \$3,000 takes money away from one or more of the others. Such a practice encourages making others look bad and increasing the visibility of what you do.

Zero-sum approach
A negotiation approach that treats the reward “pie” as fixed, so any gain one person or group achieves comes at the expense of another person or group.

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS There are also political forces at work in the relationships *between* organizations, where politics work differently depending on the organizational cultures.⁵² One study showed that when two organizations with very political environments interacted with one another, the political interactions between them hurt performance in collaborative projects. On the other hand, when companies with less internal political behavior interacted with one another, even political disputes between them did not lead to lower performance in collaborative projects. This study shows companies should be wary of forming alliances with organizations that have high levels of internal political behavior.

How Do People Respond to Organizational Politics?

For most people who have modest political skills or who are unwilling to play the politics game, outcomes tend to be predominantly negative in terms of decreased job satisfaction, increased anxiety and stress, increased turnover, and reduced performance. However, very strong evidence indicates perceptions of organizational politics are negatively related to job satisfaction.⁵³ Politics may lead to self-reported declines in employee performance, perhaps because employees perceive political environments to be unfair, which demotivates them.⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, when politicking becomes too much to handle, it can lead employees to quit.⁵⁵ The negative effects from politicking seem to be universal to most cultures. When employees of two agencies in a study in Nigeria viewed their work environments as political, for example, they reported higher levels of job distress and were less likely to help their coworkers. Thus, although developing countries such as Nigeria present perhaps more ambiguous and therefore more political environments in which to work, the negative consequences of politics appear to be the same as in the United States.⁵⁶

There are some qualifiers to keep in mind when considering the effects of politicking. First, the politics–performance relationship appears to be moderated by an individual’s understanding of the “hows” and “whys” of organizational politics. Researchers have noted, “An individual who has a clear understanding of who is responsible for making decisions and why they were selected to be the decision makers would have a better understanding of how and why things happen the way they do than someone who does not understand the decision-making process in the organization.”⁵⁷ When both politics and understanding are high, performance is likely to increase because these individuals see political activity as an opportunity. This is consistent with what you might expect for individuals with well-honed political skills. But when understanding is low, individuals are more likely to see politics as a threat, which can have a negative effect on job performance.⁵⁸



Defensive behaviors

Reactive and protective behaviors to avoid action, blame, or change.

Second, political behavior at work moderates the effects of ethical leadership.⁵⁹ One study found male employees were more responsive to ethical leadership and showed the most citizenship behavior when levels of both politics and ethical leadership were high. Women, on the other hand, appeared most likely to engage in citizenship behavior when the environment was consistently ethical and *apolitical*.

Third, when employees see politics as a threat, they often respond with **defensive behaviors**—reactive and protective behaviors to avoid action, blame, or change.⁶⁰ (Exhibit 13-4 provides some examples.) In the short run, employees may find that defensiveness protects their self-interest, but in the long run it wears them down. People who consistently rely on defensiveness find that eventually it is the only way they know how to behave. At that point, they lose the trust and support of their peers, bosses, employees, and clients.

Impression Management

We know people have an ongoing interest in how others perceive and evaluate them. For example, North Americans spend billions of dollars on diets, health club memberships, cosmetics, and plastic surgery—all intended to make them more attractive to others. Being perceived positively by others has benefits in an organizational setting. It might, for instance, help us initially to get the jobs we want in an organization and, once hired, to get favorable evaluations, superior salary increases, and more rapid promotions. The process

Avoiding Action

Overconforming. Strictly interpreting your responsibility by saying things like “The rules clearly state ...” or “This is the way we’ve always done it.”

Buck passing. Transferring responsibility for the execution of a task or decision to someone else.

Playing dumb. Avoiding an unwanted task by falsely pleading ignorance or inability.

Stretching. Prolonging a task so that one person appears to be occupied—for example, turning a two-week task into a four-month job.

Stalling. Appearing to be more or less supportive publicly while doing little or nothing privately.

Avoiding Blame

Bluffing. Rigorously documenting activity to project an image of competence and thoroughness, known as “covering your rear.”

Playing safe. Evading situations that may reflect unfavorably. It includes taking on only projects with a high probability of success, having risky decisions approved by superiors, qualifying expressions of judgment, and taking neutral positions in conflicts.

Justifying. Developing explanations that lessen one’s responsibility for a negative outcome and/or apologizing to demonstrate remorse, or both.

Scapegoating. Placing the blame for a negative outcome on external factors that are not entirely blameworthy.

Misrepresenting. Manipulation of information by distortion, embellishment, deception, selective presentation, or obfuscation.

Avoiding Change

Prevention. Trying to prevent a threatening change from occurring.

Self-protection. Acting in ways to protect one’s self-interest during change by guarding information or other resources.

EXHIBIT 13-4

Defensive Behaviors

by which individuals attempt to control the impression others form of them is called **impression management (IM)**.⁶¹ See Exhibit 13-5 for examples.

Most of the studies to test the effectiveness of IM techniques have related IM to two criteria: interview success and performance evaluations. Let's consider each of these.

Conformity

Agreeing with someone else's opinion to gain his or her approval is a form of *ingratiation*.

Example: A manager tells his boss, "You're absolutely right on your reorganization plan for the western regional office. I couldn't agree with you more."

Favors

Doing something nice for someone to gain that person's approval is a form of *ingratiation*.

Example: A salesperson says to a prospective client, "I've got two tickets to the theater tonight that I can't use. Take them. Consider it a thank-you for taking the time to talk with me."

Excuses

Explaining a predicament-creating event aimed at minimizing the apparent severity of the predicament is a *defensive IM technique*.

Example: A sales manager says to her boss, "We failed to get the ad in the paper on time, but no one responds to those ads anyway."

Apologies

Admitting responsibility for an undesirable event and simultaneously seeking to get a pardon for the action is a *defensive IM technique*.

Example: An employee says to his boss, "I'm sorry I made a mistake on the report. Please forgive me."

Self-Promotion

Highlighting your best qualities, downplaying your deficits, and calling attention to your achievements is a *self-focused IM technique*.

Example: A salesperson tells his boss, "Matt worked unsuccessfully for three years to try to get that account. I sewed it up in six weeks. I'm the best closer this company has."

Enhancement

Claiming that something you did is more valuable than most other members of the organizations would think is a *self-focused IM technique*.

Example: A journalist tells his editor, "My work on this celebrity divorce story was really a major boost to our sales" (even though the story only made it to page 3 in the entertainment section).

Flattery

Complimenting others about their virtues in an effort to make yourself appear perceptive and likeable is an *assertive IM technique*.

Example: A new sales trainee says to her peer, "You handled that client's complaint so tactfully! I could never have handled that as well as you did."

Exemplification

Doing more than you need to in an effort to show how dedicated and hardworking you are is an *assertive IM technique*.

Example: An employee sends e-mails from his work computer when he works late so that his supervisor will know how long he's been working.

Impression management (IM)

The process by which individuals attempt to control the impression others form of them.

EXHIBIT 13-5

Impression Management (IM) Techniques

Source: Based on B. R. Schlenker, *Impression Management* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1980); M. C. Bolino, K. M. Kacmar, W. H. Turnley, and J. B. Gilstrap, "A Multi-Level Review of Impression Management Motives and Behaviors," *Journal of Management* 34, no. 6 (2008), 1080–1109; and R. B. Cialdini, "Indirect Tactics of Image Management Beyond Basking," in R. A. Giacalone and P. Rosenfeld (eds.), *Impression Management in the Organization* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1989), 45–71.

INTERVIEWS AND IM The evidence indicates most job applicants use IM techniques in interviews and that it works.⁶² To develop a sense of how effective different IM techniques are in interviews, one study grouped data from thousands of recruiting and selection interviews into appearance-oriented efforts (efforts toward looking professional), explicit tactics (such as flattering the interviewer or talking up your own accomplishments), and verbal cues (such as using positive terms and showing general enthusiasm).⁶³ Across all the dimensions, it was quite clear that IM was a powerful predictor of how well people did. However, there was a twist. When interviews were highly structured, meaning the interviewer's questions were written out in advance and focused on applicant qualifications, the effects of IM were substantially weaker. Manipulative behaviors like IM are more likely to have an effect in ambiguous and unstructured interviews.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS AND IM In terms of performance evaluations, the picture is quite different. Ingratiation is positively related to performance ratings, meaning those who ingratiate with their supervisors get higher performance evaluations. However, self-promotion appears to backfire: Those who self-promote actually may receive *lower* performance ratings.⁶⁴ There is an important qualifier to these general findings. It appears that individuals high in political skill are able to translate IM into higher performance appraisals, whereas those lower in political skill are more likely to be hurt by their IM attempts.⁶⁵ One study of 760 boards of directors found that individuals who ingratiated themselves to current board members (expressed agreement with the director, pointed out shared attitudes and opinions, complimented the director) increased their chances of landing on a board.⁶⁶ Another study found that interns who attempted to use ingratiation with their supervisors were usually disliked—unless they had high levels of political skill. For those who had this ability, ingratiation led to higher levels of liking from supervisors, and higher performance ratings.⁶⁷



IM BY CULTURE Are our conclusions about responses to politics globally valid? Should we expect people in Israel, for instance, to respond the same way to impression management that people in the United States do? Almost all our conclusions on employee reactions to organizational politics and impression management are based on studies conducted in North America. The few studies that have included other countries suggest some minor modifications.⁶⁸ One study of managers in the U.S. culture and three Chinese cultures (People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) found that U.S. managers evaluated “gentle persuasion” tactics such as consultation and inspirational appeal as more effective than did their Chinese counterparts.⁶⁹ This finding may have implications for the effectiveness of impression management techniques in individualistic and collectivistic countries. Other research suggests effective U.S. leaders achieve influence by focusing on the personal goals of group members and the tasks at hand (an analytical approach), whereas influential East Asian leaders focus on relationships among group members and meeting the demands of people around them (a holistic approach). Further research is needed in this area.⁷⁰

The Ethics of Behaving Politically

Although there are no clear-cut ways to differentiate ethical from unethical politicking, there are some questions you should consider. For example, what is the utility of engaging in politicking? Sometimes we do it for little good reason. Major league baseball player Al Martin claimed he played football at USC when in fact he never did. As a baseball

player, he had little to gain by pretending to have played football! Outright lies like this may be rather rare and extreme examples of impression management, but many of us have at least distorted information to make a favorable impression. One thing to keep in mind is whether it's worth the risk. Another question is this: How does the utility of engaging in the political behavior balance out harm (or potential harm) it will do to others? Complimenting a supervisor on her appearance in order to curry favor is probably much less harmful than grabbing credit that others deserve.

Finally, does the political activity conform to standards of equity and justice? Sometimes it is difficult to weigh the costs and benefits of a political action, but the ethicality is clear. The department head who inflates the performance evaluation of a favored employee and deflates the evaluation of a disfavored employee—and then uses the evaluations to justify giving the former a big raise and the latter nothing—has treated the disfavored employee unfairly.

Unfortunately, powerful people can become very good at explaining self-serving behaviors in terms of the organization's best interests. They can persuasively argue that unfair actions are really fair and just. Those who are powerful, articulate, and persuasive are most vulnerable to ethical lapses because they are more likely to get away with them. When faced with an ethical dilemma regarding organizational politics, try to consider whether playing politics is worth the risk and whether others might be harmed in the process. If you have a strong power base, recognize the ability of power to corrupt. Remember it's a lot easier for people who are in a powerless position to act ethically, if for no other reason than they typically have very little political discretion to exploit.

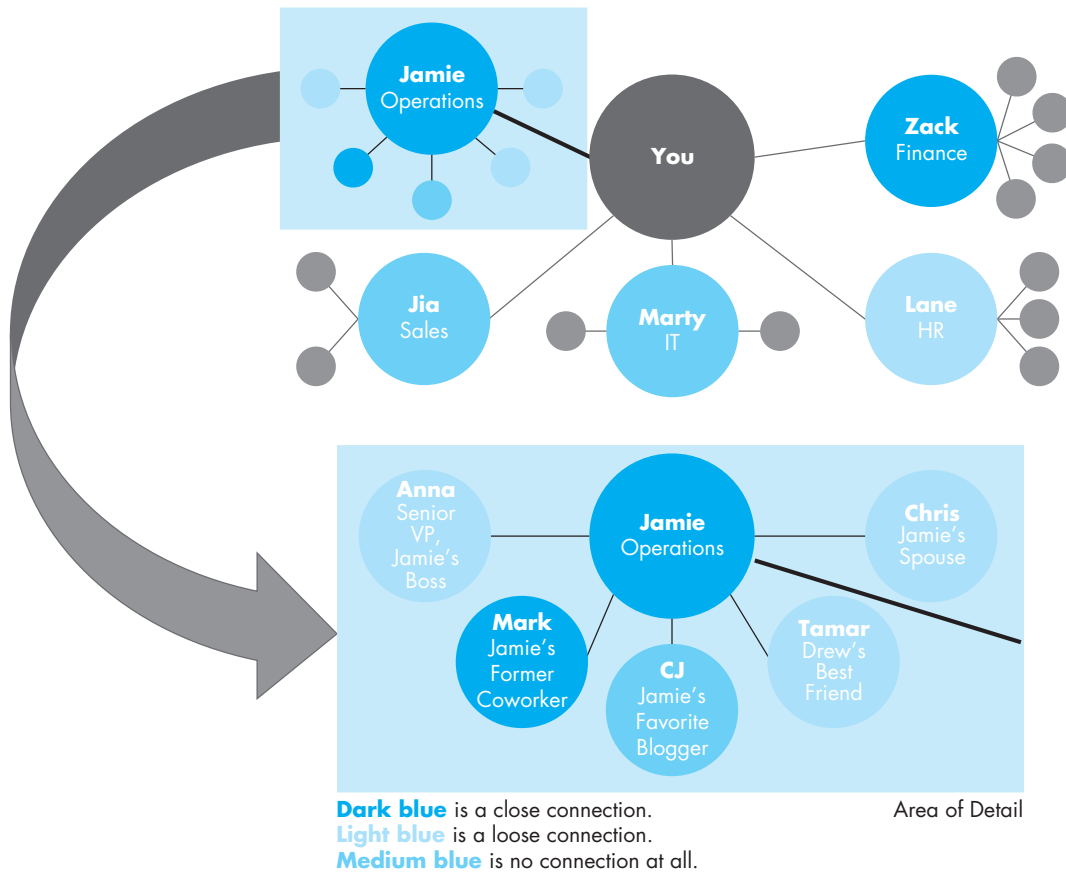
Mapping Your Political Career

As we have seen, politics is not just for politicians. You can use the concepts presented in this chapter in some very tangible ways we have outlined in your organization. However, they also have another application: You.

One of the most useful ways to think about power and politics is in terms of your own career. What are your ambitions? Who has the power to help you achieve them? What is your relationship to these people? The best way to answer these questions is with a political map, which can help you sketch out your relationships with the people upon whom your career depends. Exhibit 13-6 contains such a political map.⁷¹ Let's walk through it.

Assume your future promotion depends on five people, including Jamie, your immediate supervisor. As you can see in the exhibit, you have a close relationship with Jamie (you would be in real trouble otherwise). You also have a close relationship with Zack in finance. However, with the others you have either a loose relationship (Lane) or none at all (Jia, Marty). One obvious implication of this map is the need to formulate a plan to gain more influence over, and a closer relationship with, these people. How might you do that?

One of the best ways to influence people is indirectly. What if you played in a tennis league with Mark, Jamie's former coworker who you know remains friends with Jamie? To influence Mark, in many cases, may also be to influence Marty. Why not post an entry on CJ's blog? You can complete a similar analysis for the other four decision makers and their networks.

**EXHIBIT 13-6****Drawing Your Political Map**

Source: Based on D. Clark, "A Campaign Strategy for Your Career," *Harvard Business Review*, November 2012, 131-134.

All of this may seem a bit Machiavellian to you. However, remember that only one person gets the promotion, and your competition may have a map of his or her own. As we noted in the early part of the chapter, power and politics are a part of organizational life.

SUMMARY

Few employees relish being powerless in their jobs and organizations. People respond differently to the various power bases. Expert and referent power are derived from an individual's personal qualities. In contrast, coercion, reward, and legitimate power are essentially organizationally granted. Competence especially appears to offer wide appeal, and its use as a power base results in high performance by group members.

An effective manager accepts the political nature of organizations. Some people are more politically astute than others, meaning they are aware of the underlying politics

and can manage impressions. Those who are good at playing politics can be expected to get higher performance evaluations and, hence, larger salary increases and more promotions than the politically naïve or inept. The politically astute are also likely to exhibit higher job satisfaction and be better able to neutralize job stressors. A political map can provide a good schematic from which to identify positive politicking opportunities. Finally, power and politics present significant ethical considerations. To accept the reality of these dimensions in organizations is to accept the responsibility for awareness and ethical behavior.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERS

- To maximize your power, increase others' dependence on you. For instance, increase your power in relation to your boss by developing a needed knowledge or skill for which there is no ready substitute.
- You will not be alone in attempting to build your power bases. Others, particularly employees and peers, will be seeking to increase your dependence on them, while you are trying to minimize it and increase their dependence on you.
- Try to avoid putting others in a position where they feel they have no power.
- By assessing behavior in a political framework, you can better predict the actions of others and use that information to formulate political strategies that will gain advantages for you and your work unit.
- Consider that employees who have poor political skills or are unwilling to play the politics game generally relate perceived organizational politics to lower job satisfaction and self-reported performance, increased anxiety, and higher turnover. Therefore, if you are adept at organizational politics, help others understand the importance of becoming politically savvy.

★ TRY IT!

If your professor has assigned this, go to the Assignments section of **mymanagementlab.com** to complete the **Simulation: Power & Politics**.

★ PERSONAL INVENTORY ASSESSMENTS

Gaining Power and Influence

Do you like power and influence? Take this PIA to learn more about gaining both.

Go to **mymanagementlab.com** for the following Assisted-graded writing questions:

- 13-1.** If a person has more power, do you think his or her need for politics becomes greater or less? Why?
- 13-2. Pearson MyLab Management Only**—comprehensive writing assignment for this chapter.



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