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ORGANISATIONAL POLITICS – WHAT HAPPENS AND WHAT CAN BE DONE

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the concept of organisational politics. What exactly the concept is all about and how does this happen as a part of organisational dynamics is explored. The aspect of manipulation, gossip, games and issues that one encounters as a part of organisational politics have also been evaluated. Some discussion on how one need to handle this has also been covered.

INTRODUCTION

Organisational politics is a topic, which comes to the minds of most people in the context of organisational dynamics, every now and then. Sometimes this is also called as work place politics or office politics, which is more visibly seen. This is basically the process of how individuals use their social networking and power within the organisation, to achieve benefits to them and the organisation itself (Organizational Politics, 2012). Most of the individuals involving in this are normally, more concerned about their personal interest and not necessarily the organisational interest. This in some instance may affect the organisation itself. The benefits individuals gain may be in the form of intangible benefits like status, pseudo-authority, power and influence over others or access to tangible benefits. There could also be benefits to the organisation indirectly by making the employees more social with better interpersonal relations and help in expedite change and in getting in more efficiency and profit to the organisation. There may be positive effects like office politics (Marilyn Haight, 2012) has also been described as “Simply how power gets worked out on a practical day to day basis” (Larsen, James, 2012). “Politics is the lubricant that oils your organisations internal gears” (Bolander and Jarie, 2011). This can also take a negative shape as the personal gain as individuals are working upon is at the expense of the organisation and could also negatively impact the information

sharing, cooperation and social grouping. Hence it may help to pay attention to the organisational politics, to ensure the right political landscape exists. But what exactly is a political landscape? This in fact, is a very interesting concept as it is basically, a set of hierarchy that link the political players together, unlike the formal hierarchy, which defines the relationship between colleagues at a given time and would change as individuals are added to the existing organisational set up. Here an informal hierarchy is established in the organisation as the process of working together. The access to flow of information is something that links the individuals, on a political landscape. The hierarchy here is decided by the numerical value given to each other in the relationship. More the value given by individual rating to a person, higher is the place in the informal hierarchy (Lebarre and Polly, 1999). It is very easy to make out who is on the top of this set up and who has all the information and knows the office gossip. Employees very easily recognize where they fit into this landscape and what power and influence they and others have in the set up. As long as this power is used in the organisational pursuit it is good, but once it is used against the organisation or being abused it is not good for the organisation does not benefit any individuals.

Why do employees resort to organisational politics?

The purpose of office politics may not necessarily to gain in terms of salary hike or elevation in the rank but could be to discredit, a competitor or for the need of greater control or power. Many times people involving in this, tend to involve

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others into this to strengthen the individual's personal position and ensure they will be the last person to be accused of wrong doing. Also the career or personal gain may be shown as outwardly as an action which would benefit the organisation.

Manipulation

This is something which gets into any relationship, where one or more parties involved use indirect means to achieve their goals. This happens especially when the resources are limited and cannot be equally distributed to everybody (James and Oliver, 2013). As seen in the case of multiple candidates applying for an internal vacancy. Ideally the selection process would be fair and all candidates have to be evaluated and considered based on performance and merit. But if some candidate is not confident of this fairness but thinks he/she should influence the selection committee to give him/her an advantage over other competitors then this a form of manipulation. Later of course in this case, it may happen than those who were affected by the manipulation will expose this and the manipulator will have an argument to give and also prepared to exit as he/she is not expecting to be exposed but is more driven to control.

Gossip

Gossip is purely a natural and normal activity and happens in offices the way it happens in social circles. It is just that office gossip is a social activity that happens in the office. There are different views on whether this is healthy or harmful. Office gossip gives and individual again by controlling, the flow of information and gain through it. Though it may be contributing to office politics in some way. By itself it may not be organisational politics but definitely contributes to it in some shape and form. Organisational politics due to its more secretive nature may be more dangerous to the organisation, than public gossip which may not necessarily effect the organisation all the time. However long term excessive public or office gossip may, impact relations and focus of co-workers.

Games

Many times office politics when analysed in details, may take the shape of different games employees play (Games At Work, 2009) one example is the game of "Sand bagging" where individuals negotiate a low sales target and the payoff is bigger bonus. This example is more of budget games played with the resource of the organisation. Then they are leadership games like "Divide and Conquer", where the supervisor puts one team member, against the other, so that there is no threat to his/her power base. Interpersonal games like "No bad news", where any unpleasant news is suppressed so as to keep everybody happy or not upsetting anybody could be the payoff.

Issues

Lot many issues may come up with organisational politics, like to start with the time and other resources including, communication process of the organisation are used for personal gain at the expense of the organisation. Also office politics can affect important aspects like leadership, Strategy

formulation, Budget setting and Performance management. All this can happen as the information flow can be manipulated by distortion, supervision or by being misdirected for personal gain. Egos also may come to play in the organisational politics.

But how does one handle organisational politics?

This is a big challenge though one can also be drawn get into this but being members of the organisation tend to get drawn into it. However organisation politics is like any other game with personal contact that is played with proper rules and the associated risk that goes along with it. However organisational politics is like any other game that is played with proper rules and the associated risks that goes along with it like the landscape, players risk associated with playing the game etc. need to be clearly assessed (Berne, 2010). The strategy has to be readjusted with re-examination of players with changes whenever required for a proper adjustment or fit to the landscape in which they operate. Also all alliances of whatever from also need to reassess, with changing circumstances and need to be changed, if required. However strong alliances can help a great deal and the radar has to be on to alert any change in circumstances and situations. The alerts on change also have to be properly monitored. It always helps when employees look for hard facts and rely on these in any situation of political conflict. Employees who always look for organisational interest normally have their motivation continuous on the high. However one study also believes that seniors who encourage team members to match their values can to a great deal protect their team members from falling into the pit of organisation politics and the ill effects of which could affect their performance in some cases. All said and done in organisations when the environment is highly politically charged playing the game of organisational politics may be unavoidable. Also this tend to exhaust employees as extreme caution needs to be exercised as even interaction with people can be taxing leave alone getting work done. Avoiding and picking battles, only when one can remain afloat, is the key to surviving organisational politics.

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