# Power and Politics

Course: MBA

Subject : Organization Behavior

Unit: 4

# A Definition of Power

Power

- The capacity that A has to influence the behavior of B so that B acts in accordance with A's wishes
- Exists as a potential or fully actualized influence over a dependent relationship

- Dependency
  - B's relationship to A when A possesses something that B requires
  - The greater B's dependence, the more power A has

# Contrasting Leadership and Power

- Focuses on goal achievement
- Requires goal compatibility with followers
- Focuses influence downward

- Research Focus
  - Leadership styles and relationships with followers

# Bases of Power: Formal Power

– Established by an individual's position in an organization

- **Coercive Power**
  - » A power base dependent on fear of negative results
- **Reward Power**
  - » Compliance achieved based on the ability to distribute rewards that others view as valuable
- **Legitimate Power**
  - » The formal authority to control

# Bases of Power: Personal Power

- Power that comes from an individual's unique characteristics – these are the most effective
  - **Expert Power**
    - Influence based on special skills or knowledge
  - **Referent Power**
    - Influence based on possession by an individual of desirable resources or personal traits

# Dependency: The Key to Power

- The General Dependency Postulate
  - *The greater B's dependency on A, the greater the power A has over B*
  - Possession/control of scarce organizational resources that others need makes a manager powerful
  - Access to optional resources (e.g., multiple suppliers) reduces the resource holder's power
- Dependency increases when resources are:
  - Important
  - Scarce
  - Nonsubstitutable

# Power Tactics

- Power Tactics
  - Ways in which individuals translate power bases into specific actions
  - Nine influence tactics:
    - Legitimacy
    - Rational persuasion*
    - Inspirational appeals*
    - Consultation*
    - Exchange
    - Personal appeals
    - Ingratiation
    - Pressure
    - Coalitions

# Preferred Power Tactics by Influence Direction

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

# Factors Influencing Power Tactics

- *Choice and effectiveness of influence tactics are moderated by:*
  - **Sequencing of tactics**
    - Softer to harder tactics work best
  - **Political skill of the user**
  - **The culture of the organization**
    - Culture affects user's choice of tactic

# Sexual Harassment: A Case of Unequal Power

- Sexual Harassment:
  - Any unwanted activity of a sexual nature that affects an individual's employment and creates a hostile work environment
    - Overt actions, like unwanted touching, are relatively easy to spot
    - Subtle actions, like jokes or looks, can cross over the line into harassment
- Sexual harassment isn't about sex – it is about abusing an unequal power relationship
  - Harassment can damage the well-being of the

# Managerial Actions to Prevent Sexual Harassment

- Make sure a policy against sexual harassment is in place.
- Ensure that employees will not encounter retaliation if they file a complaint.
- Investigate every complaint and include the human resource and legal departments.
- Make sure offenders are disciplined or terminated.
- Set up in-house seminars and training.

# Politics: Power in Action

- Political Behavior
  - Activities that are not required as part of one's formal role in the organization, but that influence, or attempt to influence, the distribution of advantages or disadvantages within the organization
  - Legitimate Political Behavior
    - Normal everyday politics - complaining, bypassing, obstructing
  - Illegitimate Political Behavior
    - Extreme political behavior that violates the implied rules of the game: sabotage, whistle-blowing, and symbolic protest

# The Reality of Politics

- Politics is a natural result of resource scarcity
  - Limited resources lead to competition and political behaviors
- Judgments on quality of resource distribution differ markedly based on the observer's perception
  - "Blaming others" or "fixing responsibility"
  - "Covering your rear" or "documenting decisions"
  - "Perfectionist" or "attentive to detail"
- Most decisions are made under ambiguous conditions
  - Lack of an objective standard encourages political maneuvering of subjective reality

# Causes and Consequences of Political Behavior

# Employee Responses to Organizational Politics

# Defensive Behaviors

- Employees who perceive politics as a threat have defensive reactions
  - May be helpful in the short run, dangerous in the long run
- Types of defensive behaviors
  - Avoiding Action
    - Overconforming, buck passing, playing dumb, stalling
  - Avoiding Blame
    - Bluffing, playing safe, justifying, scapegoating
  - Avoiding Change
    - Prevention, self-protection

# Impression Management (IM)

- The process by which individuals attempt to control the impression others form of them
- IM Techniques
  - Conformity
  - Excuses
  - Apologies
  - Self-Promotion
  - Flattery
  - Favors
  - Association

# IM Effectiveness

- Job Interview Success
  - IM does work and most people use it
  - Self-promotion techniques are important
  - Ingratiation is of secondary importance
- Performance Evaluations
  - Ingratiation is positively related to

# The Ethics of Behaving Politically

- It is difficult to tell ethical from unethical politicking
- Three questions help:
  1. What is the utility of engaging in the behavior?
  2. Does the utility balance out any harm done by the action?
  3. Does the action conform to standards of equity and justice?
- Answers can be skewed toward either viewpoint

# Global Implications

- Politics Perceptions
  - Negative consequences to the perception of politics seem to be fairly widespread
- Preference for Power Tactics
  - The choice of effective tactics is heavily dependent on the culture of the country in which they are to be used
- Effectiveness of Power Tactics
  - Still open to debate; too little research has been done

# Summary and Managerial Implications

- Increase your power by having others depend on you more.
- Expert and referent power are far more effective than is coercion.
  - Greater employee motivation, performance, commitment, and satisfaction
  - Personal power basis, not organizational
- Effective managers accept the political nature of organizations.
- Political astuteness and IM can result in higher