

If mankind minus one were of one opinion, then mankind is no more justified in silencing the one than the one— if he had the power— would be justified in silencing mankind.

— John Stuart Mill

Power and Politics

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1** Contrast leadership and power.
- 2** Define the five bases of power.
- 3** Clarify what creates dependency in power relationships.
- 4** List nine influence tactics and their contingencies.
- 5** Explain how sexual harassment is about the abuse of power.
- 6** Describe the importance of a political perspective.
- 7** List the individual and organizational factors that stimulate political behavior.
- 8** Explain how defensive behaviors can protect an individual's self-interest.
- 9** Identify seven techniques for managing the impression one makes on others.
- 10** List the three questions that can help determine if a political action is ethical.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Don't Mess with This CEO

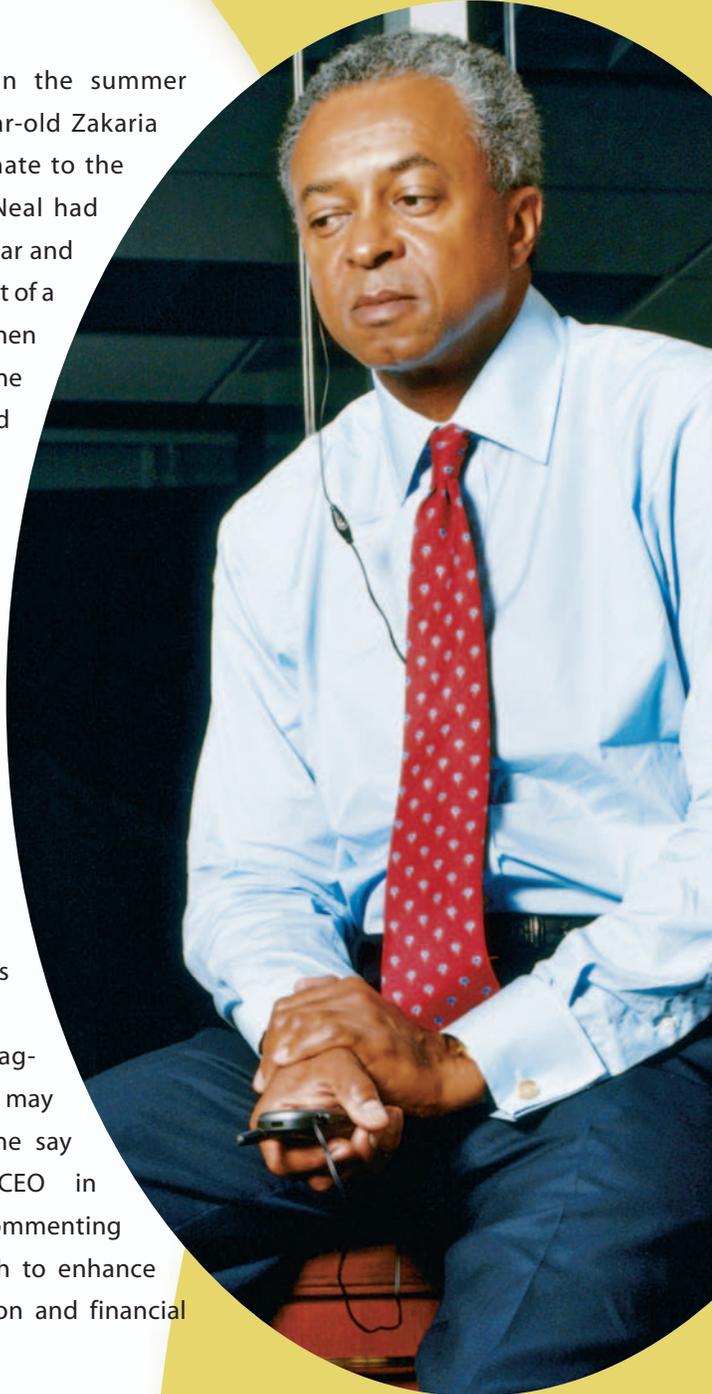
At Merrill Lynch, the huge securities firm, the message is clear: Don't try to usurp the boss's authority. Two high-level executives—Thomas Patrick and Arshad Zakaria—tried it and found themselves out on the street.¹

The boss in this case is Stan O'Neal (see photo), chairman and CEO at Merrill Lynch. And what makes these actions newsworthy is that Patrick and Zakaria were two of O'Neal's closest confidants. Patrick was executive vice chairman and the second most senior executive in the firm. Zakaria was chairman of global markets and investment banking and a protégé of Patrick. Both Patrick and Zakaria played an active role in persuading Merrill's board of directors that the firm needed major cost cutting and that O'Neal was the best person to do it. O'Neal was named president—and chief-executive-in-waiting—in July 2001. He soon began purging the company of top executives he saw as potential threats. Patrick and Zakaria were major players in helping O'Neal cut 23,000 jobs and dramatically improving the firm's profitability. His success led to his official appointment as CEO and chairman in December 2002.

According to insiders, Patrick and Zakaria's fatal mistake was secretly lobby-

ing board members in the summer of 2003 to have 41-year-old Zakaria made successor-designate to the 51-year-old O'Neal. O'Neal had been CEO less than a year and thought the appointment of a successor premature. When Patrick told O'Neal that he thought Zakaria should be installed as president and heir-apparent, O'Neal had had enough. He forced the 60-year-old Patrick to retire. A week later, he fired Zakaria. The message this sent throughout Merrill Lynch was loud and clear: O'Neal was in power and he was not going to tolerate any challenges to his authority.

In 2004, *Fortune* magazine noted that O'Neal may be the "toughest—some say the most ruthless—CEO in America" while also commenting that he has done much to enhance Merrill Lynch's reputation and financial standing. ■



Power has been described as the last dirty word. It is easier for most of us to talk about sex or money than it is to talk about power. People who have it deny it, people who want it try not to appear to be seeking it, and those who are good at getting it are secretive about how they got it.²

A major theme of this chapter is that power is a natural process in any group or organization. As such, you need to know how it's acquired and exercised if you're going to fully understand organizational behavior. Although you may have heard the phrase that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," power is not always bad. As one author has noted, most medicines can kill if taken in the wrong amount and thousands die each year in automobile accidents, but we don't abandon chemicals or cars because of the dangers associated with them. Rather, we consider danger an incentive to get training and information that will help us to use these forces productively.³ The same applies to power. It's a reality of organizational life and it's not going to go away. Moreover, by learning how power works in organizations, you'll be better able to use your knowledge to help you be a more effective manager.

A Definition of Power

Power refers to a capacity that *A* has to influence the behavior of *B* so that *B* acts in accordance with *A*'s wishes.⁴ This definition implies a *potential* that need not be actualized to be effective and a *dependency* relationship.

Power may exist but not be used. It is, therefore, a capacity or potential. One can have power but not impose it. Probably the most important aspect of power is that it is a function of **dependency**. The greater *B*'s dependence on *A*, the greater is *A*'s power in the relationship. Dependence, in turn, is based on alternatives that *B* perceives and the importance that *B* places on the alternative(s) that *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, he or she has power over you. Your alternatives are highly limited and you place a high degree of importance on obtaining a passing grade. Similarly, if you're attending college on funds totally provided by your parents, you probably recognize the power that they hold over you. You're dependent on them for financial support. But once you're out of school, have a job, and are making a good income, your parents' power is reduced significantly. Who among us, though, has not known or heard of the rich relative who is able to control a large number of family members merely through the implicit or explicit threat of "writing them out of the will"?

Contrasting Leadership and Power

A careful comparison of our description of power with our description of leadership in the previous two chapters reveals that the concepts are closely intertwined. Leaders use power as a means of attaining group goals. Leaders achieve goals, and power is a means of facilitating their achievement.

What differences are there between the two terms? One difference relates to goal compatibility. Power does not require goal compatibility, merely

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 focuses on the downward influence on one's followers. It minimizes the importance of lateral and upward influence patterns. Power does not. Still another difference deals with research emphasis. Leadership research, for the most part, 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 has tended to encompass a broader area and to focus on tactics for gaining compliance. It has gone beyond the individual as the exerciser of power because power can be used by groups as well as by individuals to control other individuals or groups.

Bases of Power

Where does power come from? What is it that gives an individual or a group influence over others? We answer these questions by dividing the bases or sources of power into two general groupings—formal and personal—and then breaking each of these down into more specific categories.⁵

Formal Power

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

Coercive Power The **coercive power** base is dependent on fear. One reacts to this power out of fear of the negative results that might occur if one failed to comply. It rests on the application, or the threat of application, of physical sanctions such as the infliction of pain, the generation of frustration through restriction of movement, or the controlling by force 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 that *B* values his or her job. Similarly, if *A* can assign *B* work activities that *B* finds unpleasant or treat *B* in a manner that *B* finds embarrassing, *A* possesses coercive power over *B*. Coercive power also can come from withholding key information. People in an organization who have data or knowledge that others need can make those others dependent on them.

Reward Power The opposite of coercive power is **reward power**. People comply with the wishes or directives of another because doing so produces positive benefits; therefore, one who can distribute rewards that others view as valuable will have power over those others. These rewards can be either financial—such as controlling pay rates, raises, and bonuses; or nonfinancial—including recognition,

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

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

coercive power A power base dependent on fear.

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



In India, Naina Lal Kidwai is a powerful woman in the banking industry. She derives her power as managing director and vice chairman of HSBC Securities and Capital Markets, a group within the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. Kidwai's formal power is an example of legitimate power, as it is based on her structural position at the bank. This power gives Kidwai the authority to control and use organizational resources.

promotions, interesting work assignments, friendly colleagues, and preferred work shifts or sales territories.⁶

Coercive power and reward power are actually counterparts of each other. If you can remove something of positive value from another or inflict something of negative value, you have coercive power over that person. If you can give someone something of positive value or remove something of negative value, you have reward power over that person.

Legitimate Power In formal groups and organizations, probably the most frequent access to one or more of the power bases is one's structural position. This is called **legitimate power**. It represents the formal authority to control and use organizational resources.

Positions of authority include coercive and reward powers. Legitimate power, however, is broader than the power to coerce and reward. Specifically, it includes acceptance by members in an organization of the authority of a position. When school principals, bank presidents, or army captains speak (assuming that their directives are viewed to be within the authority of their positions), teachers, tellers, and first lieutenants listen and usually comply.

Personal Power

You don't have to have a formal position in an organization to have power. Many of the most competent and productive chip designers at Intel, for instance, have power, but they aren't managers and have no formal power. What they have is personal power—power that comes from an individual's unique characteristics. In this section, we look at two bases of personal power—expertise and the respect and admiration of others.

Expert Power **Expert power** is influence wielded as a result of expertise, special skill, or knowledge. Expertise has become one of the most powerful sources of influence as the world has become more technologically oriented. As jobs become more specialized, we become increasingly dependent on experts to achieve goals. So, although it is generally acknowledged that physicians have expertise and hence expert power—most of us follow the advice that our doctor gives us—you should also recognize that computer specialists, tax accountants, economists, industrial psychologists, and other specialists are able to wield power as a result of their expertise.

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 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 that people like 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 you and me. One of the ways in which individuals acquire referent power is through charisma. Some people have referent power who, while not in formal leadership positions, nevertheless are able to exert influence over others because of their charismatic dynamism, likeability, and emotional effects on us.

Exhibit 14-1



Source: Drawing by Leo Cullum in *The New Yorker*, copyright © 1986 *The New Yorker Magazine*. Reprinted by permission.

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 is most important to have? Interestingly, research suggests pretty clearly that 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. Moreover, one source of formal power—coercive power—actually can backfire in that it is negatively related to employee satisfaction and commitment.⁷

Consider Steve Stoute’s company, Translation, which matches pop-star spokespersons with corporations that want to promote their brands. Stoute has paired Gwen Stefani with HP, Justin Timberlake with McDonald’s, Beyoncé Knowles with Tommy Hilfiger, and Jay-Z with Reebok. Stoute’s business seems to be all about referent power—as one record company executive commented when reflecting on Stoute’s successes, “He’s the right guy for guiding brands in using the record industry to reach youth culture in a credible way.”⁸ In other words, using pop stars to market products works because of referent power—people buy products associated with cool figures because they wish to identify with these figures and emulate them.

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

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

Earlier in this chapter it was said that probably the most important aspect of power is that it is a function of dependence. In this section, we show how an understanding of dependency is central to furthering your understanding of power itself.

The General Dependency Postulate

Let's begin with a general postulate: *The greater B's dependency on A, the greater the power A has over B.* When you possess anything that others require but that you alone control, you make them dependent on you and, therefore, you gain power over them.⁹ Dependency, then, is inversely proportional to the alternative sources of supply. If something is plentiful, possession of it will not increase your power. If everyone is intelligent, intelligence gives no special advantage. Similarly, among the superrich, money is no longer power. But, as the old saying goes, "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king!" If you can create a monopoly by controlling information, prestige, or anything that others crave, they become dependent on you. Conversely, the more that you can expand your options, the less power you place in the hands of others. This explains, for example, why most organizations develop multiple suppliers rather than give their business to only one. It also explains why so many of us aspire to financial independence. Financial independence reduces the power that others can have over us.

What Creates Dependency?

Dependency is increased when the resource you control is important, scarce, and nonsubstitutable.¹⁰

Importance If nobody wants what you've got, it's not going to create dependency. To create dependency, therefore, the thing(s) you control must be perceived as being important. Organizations, for instance, actively seek to avoid uncertainty.¹¹ We should, therefore, expect that the individuals or groups who can absorb an organization's uncertainty will be perceived as controlling an important resource. For instance, a study of industrial organizations found that the marketing departments in these firms were consistently rated as the most powerful.¹² It was concluded by the researcher that the most critical uncertainty facing these firms was selling their products. This might suggest that engineers, as a group, would be more powerful at Matsushita than at Procter & Gamble. These inferences appear to be generally valid. An organization such as Matsushita, which is heavily technologically oriented, is highly dependent on its engineers to maintain its products' technical advantages and quality. And, at Matsushita, engineers are clearly a powerful group. At Procter & Gamble, marketing is the name of the game, and marketers are the most powerful occupational group.

Scarcity As noted previously, if something is plentiful, possession of it will not increase your power. A resource needs to be perceived as scarce to create dependency. This can help to explain how low-ranking members in an organization who have important knowledge not available to high-ranking members gain power over the high-ranking members. Possession of a scarce resource—in this case, important knowledge—makes the high-ranking member dependent on the low-ranking member. This also helps to make sense out of behaviors of low-ranking members that otherwise might seem illogical, such as destroying the procedure manuals that describe how a job is done, refusing to train people



Ken Kutaragi is important at Sony Corporation. He is the founder and president of Sony Computer Entertainment, which developed the PlayStation videogame machine. Within a few years, PlayStation generated 40 percent of Sony's operating profit. This success gave Kutaragi the power to persuade Sony to invest \$2.5 billion in PlayStation 2, which captured 70 percent of the market. In this photo, Kutaragi displays a disk on a new PlayStation 2 model with a DVD recorder, TV tuner, and capability to download music and movies. Kutaragi continues to wield power at Sony by introducing successful new products such as PlayStation Portable and PlayStation 3.



At University of Kansas: Coach Gets Boss Fired?

You know you have power when you can get your boss fired. That's what apparently happened at the University of Kansas in the spring of 2003.

Roy Williams had been KU's head men's basketball coach for 15 years. During those years, he built a strong following. He averaged nearly 28 wins a season and graduated his athletes. Fans and alumni loved the guy. But Williams was a graduate of the University of North Carolina, and in the spring of 2003, UNC was looking for a new coach for its men's basketball program. Born and

raised in North Carolina, and a former assistant coach at UNC, Williams was an obvious candidate for the position. KU's administration was determined to try to keep him. Kansas Chancellor Robert Hemenway promised to "do whatever we can to encourage (Williams) to remain." That included firing his boss—athletic director Al Bohl.

Bohl had been hired in 2001 to replace the longtime athletic director, Bob Frederick, who was a close friend of Williams. But Bohl and Williams never hit it off well and had had numerous clashes. So KU's administration decided to let Bohl go in the hope that this would make Williams's job at KU more comfortable and make it easier for him to turn down any offer from UNC.

Bohl was frank in his assessment, "I believe the Kansas basketball coach had

the power to hold his athletic director in his hand like a dove. And he had a choice to either crush me with his power of influence or let me fly with my vision for a better total program. He chose to crush me."

Incidentally, KU's actions didn't get the desired response. Williams was offered the UNC position and, after considerable deliberation, decided to return to North Carolina. After a rough season in his first year at UNC, Williams's Tarheels won the National Championship. Meanwhile, Kansas hired Illinois coach Bill Self to replace Williams. Williams and Self have had their ups and downs at UNC and Kansas, respectively, and at the start of the 2005–2006 season, neither team was ranked in the top 25. And what is Al Bohl up to? He is penning a novel—about basketball.

Source: Based on "Kansas Athletic Director Blames Basketball Coach for His Dismissal," *The New York Times*, April 10, 2003, p. C17; and S. Wieberg, "Williams, N. Carolina Still Talking," *USA Today*, April 11, 2003, p. 1C.

in their jobs or even to show others exactly what they do, creating specialized language and terminology that inhibit others from understanding their jobs, or operating in secrecy so an activity will appear more complex and difficult than it really is. Ferruccio Lamborghini, the guy who created the exotic supercars that continue to carry his name, understood the importance of scarcity and used it to his advantage during World War II. Lamborghini was in Rhodes with the Italian army. His superiors were impressed with his mechanical skills, as he demonstrated an almost uncanny ability to repair tanks and cars that no one else could fix. After the war he admitted that his ability was largely due to having been the first person on the island to receive the repair manuals, which he memorized and then destroyed so as to become indispensable.¹³

The scarcity-dependency relationship can further be seen in the power of occupational categories. Individuals in occupations in which the supply of personnel is low relative to demand can negotiate compensation and benefit packages that are far more attractive than can those in occupations for which there is an abundance of candidates. College administrators have no problem today finding English instructors. The market for computer-engineering teachers, in contrast, is extremely tight, with the demand high and the supply limited. The result is that the 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 the control over that resource provides. Higher education again provides an excellent example. At universities in which there are strong pressures for the faculty to publish, we can say that a department head's power over a faculty member is inversely related to that member's publication record. The more recognition the faculty member receives through publication, the more mobile he or she is. That is, since other universities want faculty who are highly published and visible,

there is an increased demand for that person’s services. Although the concept of tenure can act to alter this relationship by restricting the department head’s alternatives, faculty members who have few or no publications have the least mobility and are subject to the greatest influence from their superiors.

Power Tactics

What **power tactics** do people use to translate power bases into specific action? That is, what options do individuals have for influencing their bosses, co-workers, or employees? And are some of these options more effective than others? In this section, we review popular tactical options and the conditions under which one may be more effective than another.

Research has identified nine distinct influence tactics:¹⁴

- *Legitimacy.* Relying on one’s authority position or stressing that a request is in accordance with organizational policies or rules.
- *Rational persuasion.* Presenting logical arguments and factual evidence to demonstrate that a request is reasonable.
- *Inspirational appeals.* Developing emotional commitment by appealing to a target’s values, needs, hopes, and aspirations.
- *Consultation.* Increasing the target’s motivation and support by involving him or her in deciding how the plan or change will be done.
- *Exchange.* Rewarding the target with benefits or favors in exchange for following 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 of other people to persuade the target or using the support of others as a reason for the target to agree.

Some tactics are usually more effective than others. Specifically, evidence indicates that rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, and consultation tend to be the most effective. On the other hand, pressure tends to frequently backfire and is typically the least effective of the nine tactics.¹⁵ You can also increase your chance of success by using more than one type of tactic at the same time or sequentially, as long as your choices are compatible.¹⁶ For instance, using both ingratiation and legitimacy can lessen the negative reactions that might come from the appearance of being “dictated to” by the boss.

But some influence tactics work better depending on the direction of influence.¹⁷ As shown in Exhibit 14-2, studies have found that rational persuasion is

Exhibit 14-2 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



Influence Tactics in China

RESEARCHERS USUALLY EXAMINE CROSS-CULTURAL influences in business by comparing two very different cultures, such as those from Eastern and Western societies.

However, it is also important to examine differences within a given culture, as those differences can sometimes be greater than differences between cultures.

For example, although we might view all Chinese people as being alike due to their shared heritage and appearance, China is a big country housing different cultures and traditions. A recent study examining Mainland Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong managers explored how the three cultural subgroups differ according to the influence tactics they prefer to use.

Though managers from all three places believe that rational persuasion and exchange are the most effective influence tactics, managers in Taiwan tend to use inspirational appeals and ingratiation more than managers from either Mainland China or Hong Kong. The study also found that managers from Hong Kong rate pressure as more effective in influencing others than do managers in Taiwan or Mainland China. Such differences have implications for business relationships. For example, Taiwanese or Mainland Chinese managers may be taken aback by the use of pressure tactics by the Hong Kong manager. Likewise, managers from Hong Kong may not be persuaded by managers from Taiwan, who tend to use ingratiating tactics. Such differences in influence tactics may make business dealings difficult. Companies should address these issues, perhaps making their managers aware of the differences within cultures.

So, managers need to know what variations exist within their local cultures so they can be better prepared to deal with others. Managers who fail to realize these differences may miss out on opportunities to deal effectively with others.

Source: Based on P. P. Fu, T. K. Peng, J. C. Kennedy, and G. Yukl, "A Comparison of Chinese Managers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China," *Organizational Dynamics*, February, 2004, pp. 32–46.

the only tactic that is effective across organizational levels. Inspirational appeals work best as a downward-influencing tactic with subordinates. When pressure works, it's almost only to achieve downward influence. And the use of personal appeals and coalitions are most effective with lateral influence attempts. In addition to the direction of influence, a number of other factors have been found to affect which tactics work best. These include the sequencing of tactics, a person's skill in using the tactic, a person's relative power, the type of request and how the request is perceived, the culture of the organization, and country-specific cultural factors.

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 (which emphasize formal power and involve greater costs and risks), such as exchange, coalitions, and pressure.¹⁸ Interestingly, it's been found that using a single soft

power tactics Ways in which individuals translate power bases into specific actions.

tactic is more effective than a single hard tactic; and that combining two soft tactics, or a soft tactic and rational persuasion, is more effective than any single tactic or a combination of hard tactics.¹⁹

Studies confirm that a tactic is “more likely to be successful if the target perceives it to be a socially acceptable form of influence behavior, if the agent has sufficient position and personal power to use the tactic, if the tactic can affect target attitudes about the desirability of the request, if it is used in a skillful way, if it is used for a request that is legitimate, and if it is consistent with the target person’s values and needs.”²⁰

We know that cultures within organizations differ markedly—for example, some are warm, relaxed, and supportive; others are formal and conservative. The organizational culture in which a person works, therefore, will have a bearing on defining which tactics are considered appropriate. Some cultures encourage the use of participation and consultation, some encourage reason, and still others rely on pressure. So the organization itself will influence which subset of power tactics is viewed as acceptable for use.

Finally, evidence indicates that people in different countries tend to prefer different power tactics.²¹ For instance, a study comparing managers in the United States and China found that the Americans perceived reason to be most effective, whereas Chinese managers preferred coalition tactics.²² These differences tend to be consistent with the values in these two countries. Reason is consistent with the preference of Americans for direct confrontation and the use of rational persuasion to influence others and resolve differences. Similarly, coalition tactics are consistent with the Chinese preference for using indirect approaches for difficult or controversial requests.

Power in Groups: Coalitions

Those “out of power” and seeking to be “in” will first try to increase their power individually. Why share the spoils if one doesn’t have to? But if this proves ineffective, the alternative is to form a **coalition**—an informal group bound together by the active pursuit of a single issue.²³ The logic of a coalition? There’s strength in numbers.

The natural way to gain influence is to become a powerholder. Therefore, those who want power will attempt to build a personal power base. But, in many instances, this may be difficult, risky, costly, or impossible. In such cases, efforts will be made to form a coalition of two or more “outs” who, by joining together, can combine their resources to increase rewards for themselves.²⁴ Successful coalitions have been found to contain fluid membership and are able to form swiftly, achieve their target issue, and quickly disappear.²⁵

What predictions can we make about coalition formation?²⁶ First, coalitions in organizations often seek to maximize their size. In political science theory, coalitions move the other way—they try to minimize their size. They tend to be just large enough to exert the power necessary to achieve their objectives. But legislatures are different from organizations. Specifically, decision making in organizations does not end just with selection from among a set of alternatives. The decision must also be implemented. In organizations, the implementation of and commitment to the decision is at least as important as the decision itself. It’s necessary, therefore, for coalitions in organizations to seek a broad constituency to support the coalition’s objectives. This means expanding the coalition to encompass as many interests as possible.

Another prediction about coalitions relates to the degree of interdependence within the organization. More coalitions will likely be created when there is a great deal of task and resource interdependence. In contrast, there will be less interdependence among subunits and less coalition formation activity when subunits are largely self-contained or resources are abundant.

Finally, coalition formation will be influenced by the actual tasks that workers do. The more routine the task of a group, the greater the likelihood that coalitions will form. The more routine the work that people do, the greater their substitutability for each other and, thus, the greater their dependence. To offset this dependence, they can be expected to resort to a coalition. This helps to explain the historical appeal of labor unions, especially among low-skilled workers. Such employees are better able to negotiate improved wages, benefits, and working conditions as a united coalition than if they acted individually. A one-person “strike” has little power over management. However, if a firm’s entire workforce goes on strike, management has a serious problem.

Sexual Harassment: Unequal Power in the Workplace

Sexual harassment is wrong. It can also be costly to employers. Just ask executives at Philip Morris, Dial, and UPS.²⁷ A Kentucky jury awarded \$2 million to a Philip Morris plant supervisor who suffered through more than a year of sexual harassment by men she supervised. Dial agreed to pay \$10 million to resolve widespread sexual harassment practices at its soap factory in Aurora, Illinois. And a former UPS manager won an \$80 million suit against UPS for fostering a hostile work environment when it failed to listen to her complaints of sexual harassment.

Not only are there legal dangers to sexual harassment, it obviously can have a negative impact on the work environment too. Research shows that sexual harassment negatively affects job attitudes and leads those who feel harassed to withdraw from the organization. Moreover, in many cases, reporting sexual harassment doesn’t improve the situation because the organization responds in a negative or unhelpful way. When organizational leaders make honest efforts to stop the harassment, the outcomes are much more positive.²⁸

Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted activity of a sexual nature that affects an individual’s employment and creates a hostile work environment. The U.S. Supreme Court helped to clarify this definition by adding that the key test for determining if sexual harassment has occurred is whether comments or behavior in a work environment “would reasonably be perceived, and is perceived, as hostile or abusive.”²⁹ But there continues to be disagreement as to what *specifically* constitutes sexual harassment. Organizations have generally made considerable progress in the past decade toward limiting overt forms of sexual harassment. This includes unwanted physical touching, recurring requests for dates when it is made clear the person isn’t interested, and coercive threats that a person will lose the job if he or she refuses a sexual proposition. The problems today are likely to surface around more subtle forms of sexual

coalition An informal group bound together by the active pursuit of a single issue.

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



A federal jury awarded \$3.2 million to Marion Shaub, a former tractor-trailer driver for Federal Express Corp., a unit of FedEx, after finding the company guilty of sexual harassment. The only female driver at her workplace, Shaub said coworkers sexually harassed her with antifemale remarks and intimidated her by tampering with the brakes on her truck. She complained to her supervisor but nothing was done to resolve the problem. The jury found the company liable for maintaining a hostile work environment.

harassment—unwanted looks or comments, off-color jokes, sexual artifacts like pin-ups posted in the workplace, or misinterpretations of where the line between “being friendly” ends and “harassment” begins.

A recent review concluded that 58 percent of women report having experienced potentially harassing behaviors and 24 percent report having experienced sexual harassment at work.³⁰ One problem with sexual harassment is that it is, to some degree, in the eye of the beholder. For example, women are more likely to see a given behavior or sets of behaviors as constituting sexual harassment. Men are less likely to see as harassment such behaviors as kissing someone, asking for a date, or making sex-stereotyped jokes. As the authors of this study note, “Although progress has been made at defining sexual harassment, it is still unclear as to whose perspective should be taken.”³¹ Thus, although some behaviors indisputably constitute harassment, men and women continue to differ to some degree on what constitutes harassment. For you, the best approach is to be careful—refrain from any behavior that may be taken as harassing even if that was not your intent. Realize that what you see as an innocent joke or hug may be seen as harassment by the other party.

Most studies confirm that the concept of power is central to understanding sexual harassment.³² This seems to be true whether the harassment comes from a supervisor, a coworker, or an employee. And, sexual harassment is more likely to occur when there are large power differentials. The supervisor-employee dyad best characterizes an unequal power relationship, where formal power gives the supervisor the capacity to reward and coerce. Supervisors give employees their assignments, evaluate their performance, make recommendations for salary adjustments and promotions, and even decide whether or not an employee retains his or her job. These decisions give a supervisor power. Because employees want favorable performance reviews, salary increases, and the like, it’s clear supervisors control resources that most employees consider important and scarce. It’s also worth noting that individuals who occupy high-status roles (like management positions) sometimes believe that sexually harassing employees is merely an extension of their right to make demands on lower-status individuals. Because of power inequities, sexual harassment by one’s boss typically creates the greatest difficulty for those who are being harassed. If there are no witnesses, it is the victim’s word against the harasser’s. Are there others this boss has harassed and, if so, will they come forward? Because of the supervisor’s control over resources, many of those who are harassed are afraid of speaking out for fear of retaliation by the supervisor.

Although coworkers don’t have legitimate power, they can have influence and use it to sexually harass peers. In fact, although coworkers appear to engage in somewhat less severe forms of harassment than do supervisors, coworkers are the most frequent perpetrators of sexual harassment in organizations. How do coworkers exercise power? Most often it’s by providing or withholding information, cooperation, and support. For example, the effective performance of most jobs requires interaction and support from coworkers. This is especially true nowadays because work is often assigned to teams. By threatening to withhold or delay providing information that’s necessary for the successful achievement of your work goals, coworkers can exert power over you.

Although it doesn’t get nearly the attention that harassment by a supervisor does, as seen in the lawsuit against Philip Morris, women in positions of power can be subjected to sexual harassment from males who occupy less powerful positions within the organization. This is usually achieved by the employee devaluing the woman through highlighting traditional gender stereotypes (such as helplessness, passivity, lack of career commitment) that reflect negatively on the woman in power. An employee may engage in such practices to

attempt to gain some power over the higher-ranking female or to minimize power differentials. Increasingly, too, there are cases of women in positions of power harassing male employees.

The topic of sexual harassment is about power. It's about an individual controlling or threatening another individual. It's wrong. And whether perpetrated against women or men, it's illegal. But you can understand how sexual harassment surfaces in organizations if you analyze it in terms of power.

We have seen how sexual harassment can wreak havoc on an organization, but it can be avoided. A manager's role in preventing sexual harassment is critical. Some ways managers can protect themselves and their employees from sexual harassment follow:

1. Make sure a policy is in place that defines what constitutes sexual harassment, that informs employees that they can be fired for sexually harassing another employee, and that establishes procedures for how complaints can be made.
2. Ensure employees that they will not encounter retaliation if they issue a complaint.
3. Investigate every complaint and include the legal and human resource departments.
4. Make sure that offenders are disciplined or terminated.
5. Set up in-house seminars to raise employee awareness of the issues surrounding sexual harassment.

The bottom line is that managers have a responsibility to protect their employees from a hostile work environment, but they also need to protect themselves. Managers may 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.

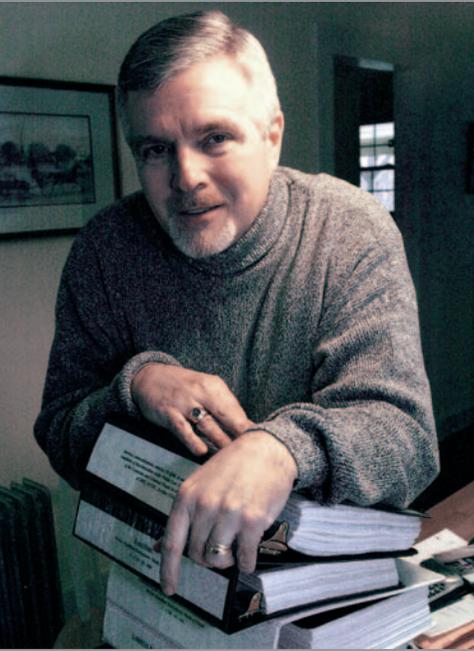
Politics: Power in Action

When people get together in groups, power will be exerted. People want to carve out a niche from which to exert influence, to earn rewards, and to advance their careers.³³ When employees in organizations 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.³⁴

Definition

There has been no shortage of definitions for organizational politics. Essentially, however, they have focused on the use of power to affect decision making in the organization or on behaviors by members that are self-serving and organizationally nonsanctioned.³⁵ For our purposes, we shall define **political behavior** in organizations as activities that are not required as part

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 and disadvantages within the organization.*



Whistle-blowing is considered an illegitimate political behavior that often results in job loss. That's what happened to David Welch, chief financial officer of Bank of Floyd in Virginia. Welch blew the whistle on the bank's president, alleging that he engaged in the unethical business practice of buying stocks before the announcement of a bank merger. As a result, Welch was fired. Shown here with documents supporting his allegation, Welch hopes his evidence is powerful enough to vindicate his political behavior.

of one's formal role in the organization, but that influence, or attempt to influence, the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organization.³⁶ This definition encompasses key elements from what most people mean when they talk about organizational politics. Political behavior is outside one's specified job requirements. The behavior requires some attempt to use one's power bases. In addition, our definition encompasses efforts to influence the goals, criteria, or processes used for *decision making* when we state that politics is concerned with "the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organization." 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 about organizational activities to the media, exchanging favors with others in the organization for mutual benefit, and lobbying on behalf of or against a particular individual or decision alternative.

A final comment relates to what has been referred to as the "legitimate-illegitimate" dimension in political behavior.³⁷ **Legitimate political behavior** refers to normal everyday politics—complaining to your supervisor, bypassing the chain of command, forming coalitions, obstructing organizational policies or decisions through inaction or excessive adherence to rules, and developing contacts outside the organization through one's professional activities. On the other hand, there are also **illegitimate political behaviors** that violate the implied rules of the game. Those who pursue such extreme activities are often described as individuals who "play hardball." Illegitimate activities include sabotage, whistle-blowing, and symbolic protests such as wearing unorthodox dress or protest buttons, and groups of employees simultaneously calling in sick.

The vast majority of all organizational political actions are of the legitimate variety. The reasons are pragmatic: The extreme illegitimate forms of political behavior pose a very real risk of loss of organizational membership or extreme sanctions against those who use them and then fall short in having enough power to ensure that they work.

The Reality of Politics

Politics is a fact of life in organizations. People who ignore this fact of life do so at their own peril. But why, you may wonder, must politics exist? Isn't it possible for an organization to be politics-free? It's *possible*, but most unlikely.

Organizations are made up of individuals and groups with different values, goals, and interests.³⁸ This sets up the potential for conflict over resources. Departmental budgets, space allocations, project responsibilities, and salary adjustments are just a few examples of the resources about whose allocation organizational members will disagree.

Resources in organizations are also limited, which often turns potential conflict into real conflict.³⁹ If resources were abundant, then all the various constituencies within the organization could satisfy their goals. But because they are limited, not everyone's interests can be provided for. Furthermore, whether true or not, gains by one individual or group are often *perceived* as being at the expense of others within the organization. These forces create competition among members for the organization's limited resources.

Maybe the most important factor leading to politics within organizations is the realization that most of the "facts" that are used to allocate the limited resources are open to interpretation. What, for instance, is *good* performance? What's an *adequate* improvement? What constitutes an *unsatisfactory* job? One person's view that an act is a "selfless effort to benefit the organization" is seen

by another as a “blatant attempt to further one’s interest.”⁴⁰ The manager 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 other factors—less objective ones—come into play: fielding expertise, attitude, potential, ability to perform in a clutch, loyalty to the team, and so on. More managerial decisions resemble choosing between a .280 and a .290 hitter than deciding 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 (see Exhibit 14-3).

Finally, because most decisions have to be made in a climate of ambiguity—where facts are rarely fully objective, and thus are open to interpretation—people within organizations will use whatever influence they can to taint the facts to support their goals and interests. That, of course, creates the activities we call *politicking*.

Therefore, to answer the earlier question of whether it is possible for an organization to be politics-free, we can say: “Yes,” 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 that most of us live in.

Exhibit 14-3 Politics Is in the Eye of the Beholder

A behavior that one person labels as “organizational politics” is very likely to be characterized as an instance of “effective management” by another. The fact is not that effective management is necessarily political, although in some cases it might be. Rather, a person’s reference point determines what he or she classifies as organizational politics. Take a look at the following labels used to describe the same phenomenon. These suggest that politics, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

“Political” Label		“Effective Management” Label
1. Blaming others	vs.	Fixing responsibility
2. “Kissing up”	vs.	Developing working relationships
3. Apple polishing	vs.	Demonstrating loyalty
4. Passing the buck	vs.	Delegating authority
5. Covering your rear	vs.	Documenting decisions
6. Creating conflict	vs.	Encouraging change and innovation
7. Forming coalitions	vs.	Facilitating teamwork
8. Whistle-blowing	vs.	Improving efficiency
9. Scheming	vs.	Planning ahead
10. Overachieving	vs.	Competent and capable
11. Ambitious	vs.	Career-minded
12. Opportunistic	vs.	Astute
13. Cunning	vs.	Practical-minded
14. Arrogant	vs.	Confident
15. Perfectionist	vs.	Attentive to detail

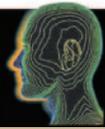
Source: Based on T. C. Krell, M. E. Mendenhall, and J. Sendry, “Doing Research in the Conceptual Morass of Organizational Politics,” paper presented at the Western Academy of Management Conference, Hollywood, CA April 1987.

legitimate political behavior *Normal everyday politics.*

illegitimate political behavior *Extreme political behavior that violates the implied rules of the game.*



Myth or Science?



"It's Not What You Know, It's Who You Know"

This statement is somewhat true. While knowledge of *facts* is an increasingly important source of power in an information-based society, knowing the *right people* increases your chances of getting ahead.

Networking is the term for establishing effective relationships with key people inside and/or outside the organization. And networking has been found to be the most important activity performed by managers who were promoted the fastest.⁴¹

A study of general managers found that they fully understood the importance of networking.⁴² They established a wide political network of key people from both inside and outside their organizations. This network provided these managers with information and established cooperative relationships that could enhance their careers. The man-

agers did favors for these contacts, stressed the contacts' obligations to them, and "called in" those obligations when they needed support.

Research also indicates that a person's location within an organization is an important determinant of his or her influence.⁴³ Being in the right place increases your ability to know "the right people." This further supports the importance of contacts over knowledge of facts in gaining influence.

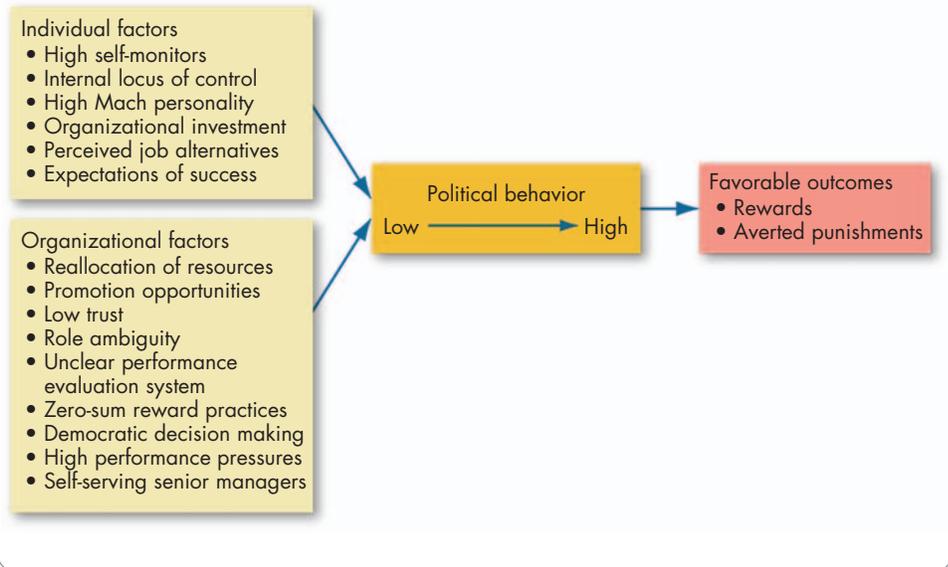
You should not interpret the preceding evidence to mean that job-relevant expertise is not important. Rather, it means that "who you know" is an important *additional* factor in organizational life. And for people who want to get ahead or build their political power within an organization, spending time and effort developing a network of contacts will be a wise investment. ■

Factors Contributing to Political Behavior

Not all groups or organizations are equally political. In some organizations, for instance, politicking is overt and rampant, while in others, politics plays a small role in influencing outcomes. Why is there this variation? Recent research and observation have identified a number of factors that appear to encourage political behavior. Some are individual characteristics, derived from the unique qualities of the people the organization employs; others are a result of the organization's culture or internal environment. Exhibit 14-4 illustrates how both individual and organizational factors can increase political behavior and provide favorable outcomes (increased rewards and averted punishments) for both individuals and groups in the organization.

Individual Factors At the individual level, researchers have identified certain personality traits, needs, and other factors that are 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 are more likely to engage in political behavior.⁴⁴ 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. Individuals with an internal locus of control, because they believe they can control their environment, are more prone to take a proactive stance and attempt to manipulate situations in their favor. Not surprisingly, the Machiavellian personality—which is characterized by the will to manipulate and the desire for power—is comfortable using politics as a means to further his or her self-interest.

In addition, an individual's investment in the organization, perceived alternatives, and expectations of success will influence the degree to which he or she will pursue illegitimate means of political action.⁴⁵ The more a person has invested in the organization in terms of expectations of increased future benefits, the more that person has to lose if forced out and the less likely he or she is to use illegitimate means. The more alternative job opportunities an individual has—due to a favorable job market or the possession of scarce skills or knowledge, a prominent reputation, or influential contacts outside the organization—the more likely that individual is to risk illegitimate political actions. Finally, if

Exhibit 14-4 Factors That Influence Political Behavior

an individual has a low expectation of success in using illegitimate means, it is unlikely that he or she will attempt to do so. High expectations of success in the use of illegitimate means are most likely to be the province of both experienced and powerful individuals with polished political skills and inexperienced and naive employees who misjudge their chances.

Organizational Factors Political activity is probably more a function of the organization's characteristics than of individual difference variables. Why? Because many organizations have a large number of employees with the individual characteristics we listed, yet the extent of political behavior varies widely.

Although we acknowledge the role that individual differences can play in fostering politicking, the evidence more strongly supports that certain situations and cultures promote politics. More 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.⁴⁶ In addition, cultures characterized by low trust, role ambiguity, unclear performance evaluation systems, zero-sum reward allocation practices, democratic decision making, high pressures for performance, and self-serving senior managers will create breeding grounds for politicking.⁴⁷

When organizations downsize to improve efficiency, reductions in resources have to be made. Threatened with the loss of resources, people may engage in political actions to safeguard what they have. But any changes, especially those that imply significant reallocation of resources within the organization, are likely to stimulate conflict and increase politicking.

Promotion decisions have consistently been found to be one of the most political actions in organizations. The opportunity for promotions or advancement encourages people to compete for a limited resource and to try to positively influence the decision outcome.

The less trust there is within the organization, the higher the level of political behavior and the more likely that the political behavior will be of the illegitimate kind. So high trust should suppress the level of political behavior in general and inhibit illegitimate actions in particular.

The slogan and graphic on this employee's shirt portray an obvious lack of trust. Union workers shown here at a General Electric plant protested the company's plan to increase their health insurance copayment from 20 to 30 percent. GE's commitment of resources has changed due to the soaring costs of employee health insurance. GE and many other companies argue that the high cost of health insurance is hurting their profits and competitiveness. In fact, the major sticking point in GM's 2005 negotiations with the UAW was also over health care costs (in the past, GM has paid 100 percent of employees' premiums and there were no copayments). Employees, however, want to safeguard their current low copayments.



Role ambiguity means that the prescribed behaviors of the employee are not clear. There are fewer limits, therefore, to the scope and functions of the employee's political actions. Because political activities are defined as those not required as part of one's formal role, the greater the role ambiguity, the more one can engage in political activity with little chance of it being visible.

The practice of performance evaluation is far from a perfect science. The more that organizations use subjective criteria in the appraisal, emphasize a single outcome measure, or allow significant time to pass between the time of an action and its appraisal, the greater the likelihood that an employee can get away with politicking. Subjective performance criteria create ambiguity. The use of a single outcome measure encourages individuals to do whatever is necessary to "look good" on that measure, but often at the expense of performing well on other important parts of the job that are not being appraised. The amount of time that elapses between an action and its appraisal is also a relevant factor. The longer the time, the more unlikely that the employee will be held accountable for his or her political behaviors.

The more that an organization's 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 that any gain one person or group achieves has to come at the expense of another person or group. If I win, you must lose! If \$15,000 in annual raises is to be distributed among five employees, then 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.

In the past 25 years, there has been a general move in North America and among most developed nations toward making organizations less autocratic. Managers in these organizations are being asked to behave more democratically. They're told that they should allow employees to advise them on decisions and that they should rely to a greater extent on group input into the decision process. Such moves toward democracy, however, are not necessarily embraced

by all individual managers. Many managers sought their positions in order to have legitimate power so as to be able to make unilateral decisions. They fought hard and often paid high personal costs to achieve their influential positions. Sharing their power with others runs directly against their desires. The result is that managers, especially those who began their careers in the 1960s and 1970s, may use the required committees, conferences, and group meetings in a superficial way, as arenas for maneuvering and manipulating.

The more pressure that employees feel to perform well, the more likely they are to engage in politicking. When people are held strictly accountable for outcomes, this puts great pressure on them to “look good.” If a person perceives that his or her entire career is riding on next quarter’s sales figures or next month’s plant productivity report, there is motivation to do whatever is necessary to make sure the numbers come out favorably.

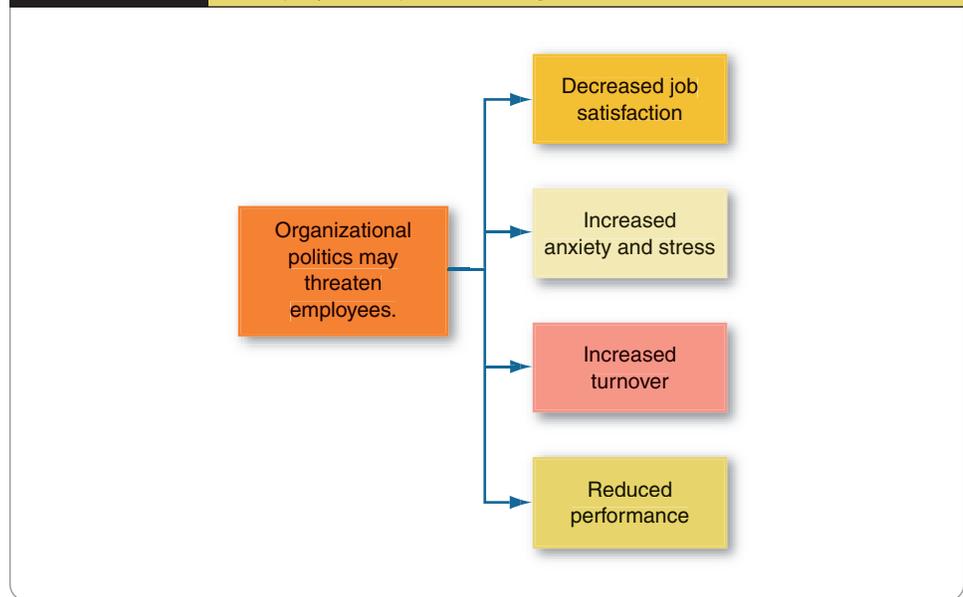
Finally, when employees see the people on top engaging in political behavior, especially when they do so successfully and are rewarded for it, a climate is created that supports politicking. Politicking by top management, in a sense, gives permission to those lower in the organization to play politics by implying that such behavior is acceptable.

How Do People Respond to Organizational Politics?

Trish O’Donnell loves her job as a writer on a weekly television comedy series but hates the internal politics. “A couple of the writers here spend more time kissing up to the executive producer than doing any work. And our head writer clearly has his favorites. While they pay me a lot and I get to really use my creativity, I’m sick of having to be on alert for backstabbers and constantly having to self-promote my contributions. I’m tired of doing most of the work and getting little of the credit.” Are Trish O’Donnell’s comments typical of people who work in highly politicized workplaces? We all know of friends or relatives who regularly complain about the politics at their job. But how do people in general react to organizational politics? Let’s look at the evidence.

In our discussion earlier in this chapter of factors that contribute to political behavior, we focused on the favorable outcomes for individuals who successfully engage in politicking. But for most people—who have modest political skills or are unwilling to play the politics game—outcomes tend to be predominantly negative. Exhibit 14-5 summarizes the extensive research on the relationship between organizational politics and individual outcomes.⁴⁸ There is, for instance, very strong evidence indicating that perceptions of organizational politics are negatively related to job satisfaction.⁴⁹ The perception of politics also tends to increase job anxiety and stress. This seems to be due to the perception that, by not engaging in politics, a person may be losing ground to others who are active politickers; or, conversely, because of the additional pressures individuals feel because of having entered into and competing in the political arena.⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, when politicking becomes too much to handle, it can lead to employees quitting.⁵¹ Finally, there is preliminary evidence suggesting that politics leads to self-reported declines in employee performance. This may occur because employees perceive political environments to be unfair, which demotivates them.⁵²

In addition to these conclusions, several interesting qualifiers have been noted. First, the politics–performance relationship appears to be moderated by an individual’s understanding of the “hows” and “whys” of organizational politics. “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.”⁵³ When both politics and understanding are high, performance

Exhibit 14-5 Employee Responses to Organizational Politics

is likely to increase because the individual will see political actions as an opportunity. This is consistent with what you might expect among individuals with well-honed political skills. But when understanding is low, individuals are more likely to see politics as a threat, which would have a negative effect on job performance.⁵⁴ Second, when politics is seen as a threat and consistently responded to with defensiveness, negative outcomes are almost sure to surface eventually. When people perceive politics as a threat rather than as an opportunity, they often respond with **defensive behaviors**—reactive and protective behaviors to avoid action, blame, or change⁵⁵ (Exhibit 14-6 provides some examples of these defensive behaviors). And defensive behaviors are often associated with negative feelings toward the job and work environment.⁵⁶ 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.

Are our conclusions about responses to politics globally valid? Should we expect employees in Israel, for instance, to respond the same way to workplace politics that employees in the United States do? Almost all our conclusions on employee reactions to organizational politics are based on studies conducted in North America. The few studies that have included other countries suggest some minor modifications.⁵⁷ Israelis and Brits, for instance, seem to generally respond as do North Americans. That is, the perception of organizational politics among employees in these countries is related to decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover.⁵⁸ But in countries that are more politically unstable, like Israel, employees seem to demonstrate greater tolerance of intense political processes in the workplace. This is likely to be because people in these countries are used to power struggles and have more experience in coping with them.⁵⁹ This suggests that people from politically turbulent countries in the Middle East or Latin America might be more accepting of organizational politics, and even more willing to use aggressive political tactics in the workplace, than people from countries such as Great Britain or Switzerland.

Exhibit 14-6 Defensive Behaviors**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

Buffing. This is a nice way to refer to “covering your rear.” It describes the practice of rigorously documenting activity to project an image of competence and thoroughness.

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.

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.

Impression Management

We know that 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.⁶⁰ Being perceived positively by others should have benefits for people in organizations. It might, for instance, help them initially to get the jobs they want in an organization and, once hired, to get favorable evaluations, superior salary increases, and more rapid promotions. In a political context, it might help sway the distribution of advantages in their favor. The process by which individuals attempt to control the impression others form of them is called **impression management**.⁶¹ It’s a subject that has gained the attention of OB researchers only recently.⁶²

Is everyone concerned with impression management (IM)? No! Who, then, might we predict to engage in IM? No surprise here! It’s our old friend, the high self-monitor.⁶³ Low self-monitors tend to present images of themselves that are consistent with their personalities, regardless of the beneficial or detrimental effects for them. In contrast, high self-monitors are good at reading situations and molding their appearances and behavior to fit each situation. Given that you want to control the impression others form of you, what techniques could you

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

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

use? Exhibit 14-7 summarizes some of the more popular IM techniques and provides an example of each.

Keep in mind that IM does not imply that the impressions people convey are necessarily false (although, of course, they sometimes are).⁶⁴ Excuses, for instance, may be offered with sincerity. Referring to the example used in Exhibit 14-7, you can *actually* believe that ads contribute little to sales in your region. But misrepresentation can have a high cost. If the image claimed is false, you may be discredited.⁶⁵ If you “cry wolf” once too often, no one is likely to believe you when the wolf really comes. So the impression manager must be cautious not to be perceived as insincere or manipulative.⁶⁶

Are there *situations* in which individuals are more likely to misrepresent themselves or more likely to get away with it? Yes—situations that are characterized by

Exhibit 14-7 Impression Management (IM) Techniques

Conformity

Agreeing with someone else’s opinion in order to gain his or her approval.

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.”

Excuses

Explanations of a predicament-creating event aimed at minimizing the apparent severity of the predicament.

Example: Sales manager to 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.

Example: Employee to boss, “I’m sorry I made a mistake on the report. Please forgive me.”

Self-Promotion

Highlighting one’s best qualities, downplaying one’s deficits, and calling attention to one’s achievements.

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.”

Flattery

Complimenting others about their virtues in an effort to make oneself appear perceptive and likeable.

Example: New sales trainee to peer, “You handled that client’s complaint so tactfully! I could never have handled that as well as you did.”

Favors

Doing something nice for someone to gain that person’s approval.

Example: Salesperson to 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.”

Association

Enhancing or protecting one’s image by managing information about people and things with which one is associated.

Example: A job applicant says to an interviewer, “What a coincidence. Your boss and I were roommates in college.”

Source: Based on B. R. Schlenker, *Impression Management* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1980); W. L. Gardner and M. J. Martinko, “Impression Management in Organizations,” *Journal of Management*, June 1988, p. 332; 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 Associates, 1989), pp. 45–71.

high uncertainty or ambiguity provide relatively little information for challenging a fraudulent claim and reduce the risks associated with misrepresentation.⁶⁷

Most of the studies undertaken to test the effectiveness of IM techniques have related it to two criteria: (1) interview success; and (2) performance evaluations. Let's consider each of these.

The evidence indicates that most job applicants use IM techniques in interviews⁶⁸ and that, when IM behavior is used, it works.⁶⁹ In one study, for instance, interviewers felt that applicants for a position as a customer service representative who used IM techniques performed better in the interview, and they seemed somewhat more inclined to hire these people.⁷⁰ Moreover, when the researchers considered applicants' credentials, they concluded that it was the IM techniques alone that influenced the interviewers. That is, it didn't seem to matter if applicants were well or poorly qualified. If they used IM techniques, they did better in the interview.

Research indicates that some IM techniques work better than others in the interview. Researchers have compared applicants who used IM techniques that focused on promoting one's accomplishments (called *self-promotion*) to applicants who used techniques that focused on complimenting the interviewer and finding areas of agreement (referred to as *ingratiation*). In general, applicants appear to use self-promotion more than ingratiation.⁷¹ What's more, self-promotion tactics may be more important to interviewing success. Applicants who work to create an appearance of competence by enhancing their accomplishments, taking credit for successes, and explaining away failures do better in interviews. These effects reach beyond the interview—applicants who use more self-promotion tactics also seem to get more follow-up job-site visits, even after adjusting for grade-point average, gender, and job type. Ingratiation also works well in the interview, meaning that applicants who compliment the interviewer, agree with his or her opinions, and emphasize areas of fit do better than those who don't.⁷²

In terms of performance ratings, the picture is quite different. Ingratiation is positively related to performance ratings, meaning that those who ingratiate with their supervisors get higher performance evaluations. However, self-promotion appears to backfire—those who self-promote actually seem to receive *lower* performance evaluations.⁷³

What explains these results? If you think about them, they make sense. Ingratiating always works because everyone likes to be treated nicely, whether it be the interviewer or the supervisor. However, self-promotion may work only in interviews and backfire on the job because whereas the interviewer has little idea whether you're blowing smoke about your accomplishments, the supervisor knows because it's his or her job to observe you. Thus, if you're going to self-promote, remember that what works in the interview will not always work once you're on the job.

The Ethics of Behaving Politically

We conclude our discussion of politics by providing some ethical guidelines for political behavior. Although there are no clear-cut ways to differentiate ethical from unethical politicking, there are some questions you should consider. Ask yourself: what is the utility of engaging in the behavior? Sometimes we engage in political behaviors for little good reason. For example, Major League Baseball player Al Martin claimed he played football at USC when in fact he never did. Because Martin was playing baseball, not football, there was little to be gained by his lie. Outright lies like this may be a rather extreme example of impression management, but many of us have distorted information to make a favorable impression. The point is that before we do so, one thing to keep in mind is whether it's really worth the risk. Another question to ask is an ethical one—how does the utility of engaging in the political behavior balance out any harm (or potential harm) it will do to others? For example, complimenting a

supervisor on his or her appearance to curry favor is probably much less harmful than grabbing credit for a project that is deserved by others.

The final question that needs to be addressed is whether the political activity conforms to standards of equity and justice. Sometimes it is hard to weigh the costs and benefits of a political action, but its 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 these evaluations to justify giving the former a big raise and nothing to the latter—has treated the disfavored employee unfairly.

Unfortunately, the answers to these questions are often argued in ways to make unethical practices seem ethical. Powerful people, for example, can become very good at explaining self-serving behaviors in terms of the organization's best interests. Similarly, they can persuasively argue that unfair actions are really fair and just. Our point is that immoral people can justify almost any behavior. Those who are powerful, articulate, and persuasive are most vulnerable because they are likely to be able to get away with unethical practices successfully. When faced with an ethical dilemma regarding organizational politics, try to consider the preceding issues (is playing politics worth the risk and will others 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 the powerless to act ethically, if for no other reason than they typically have very little political discretion to exploit.

Finally, we've talked a lot about political behavior in organizations. But what about your political skills? Are you comfortable playing politics at work? Or do you think your political skills might need some work? See the self-assessment feature to find out.



HOW GOOD AM I AT PLAYING POLITICS?

In the Self-Assessment Library (available on CD, online, and in print), take assessment II.C.3 (How Good Am I at Playing Politics?) and answer the following questions.

1. *How did you score relative to your classmates? Do you think your score is accurate? Why or why not?*
2. *Do you think political skills are important in the workplace? If yes, why? If no, why not?*
3. *Would you want to be known for your political skills? If yes, why? If no, why not?*

Summary and Implications for Managers

If you want to get things done in a group or organization, it helps to have power. As a manager who wants to maximize your power, you will want to increase others' dependence on you. You can, for instance, increase your power in relation to your boss by developing knowledge or a skill that she needs and for which she perceives no ready substitute. But power is a two-way street. You will not be alone in attempting to build your power bases. Others, particularly employees and peers, will be seeking to make you dependent on them. The result is a continual battle. While you seek to maximize others' dependence on you, you will be seeking to minimize your dependence on others. And, of course, others you work with will be trying to do the same.

Few employees relish being powerless in their job and organization. It's been argued, for instance, that when people in organizations are difficult, argu-

mentative, and temperamental, it may be because they are in positions of powerlessness; positions in which the performance expectations placed on them exceed their resources and capabilities.⁷⁴

There is evidence that people respond differently to the various power bases.⁷⁵ Expert and referent power are derived from an individual's personal qualities. In contrast, coercion, reward, and legitimate power are essentially organizationally derived. Because people are more likely to enthusiastically accept and commit to an individual whom they admire or whose knowledge they respect (rather than someone who relies on his or her position for influence), the effective use of expert and referent power should lead to higher employee motivation, performance, commitment, and satisfaction.⁷⁶ Competence especially appears to offer wide appeal, and its use as a power base results in high performance by group members. The message for managers seems to be: Develop and use your expert power base!

The power of your boss may also play a role in determining your job satisfaction. "One of the reasons many of us like to work for and with people who are powerful is that they are generally more pleasant—not because it is their native disposition, but because the reputation and reality of being powerful permits them more discretion and more ability to delegate to others."⁷⁷

The effective manager accepts the political nature of organizations. By assessing behavior in a political framework, you can better predict the actions of others and use this information to formulate political strategies that will gain advantages for you and your work unit.

Some people are significantly more "politically astute" than others, meaning that 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 naive or inept.⁷⁸ The politically astute are also likely to exhibit higher job satisfaction and be better able to neutralize job stressors.⁷⁹ For employees with poor political skills or who are unwilling to play the politics game, the perception of organizational politics is generally related to lower job satisfaction and self-reported performance, increased anxiety, and higher turnover.

Managing Impressions Is Unethical

Managing impressions is wrong for both ethical and practical reasons.

First, managing impressions is just another name for lying. Don't we have a responsibility, both to ourselves and to others, to present ourselves as we really are? The Australian philosopher Tony Coady wrote, "Dishonesty has always been perceived in our culture, and in all cultures but the most bizarre, as a central human vice." Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative asks us to consider the following: If you want to know whether telling a lie on a particular occasion is justifiable, you must try to imagine what would happen if everyone were to lie. Surely you would agree that a world in which no one lies is preferable to one in which lying is common, because in such a world we could never trust anyone. Thus, we should try to present the truth as best we can. Impression management goes against this virtue.

Practically speaking, impression management generally backfires in the long run. Remember Sir Walter Scott's quote, "Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!" Once we start to distort the facts, where do we stop? When George O'Leary was hired as Notre Dame's football coach, he said on his résumé that 30 years before he had obtained a degree from Stony Brook University that he never earned. Obviously, this information was unimportant to his football accomplishments, and ironically, he had written it on his resume 20 years earlier when hired for a job at Syracuse University; he had simply never corrected the inaccuracies. But when the truth came out, O'Leary was finished.

At Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, the code of ethics instructs students to provide only truthful information on their résumés and obligates them to be honest in interviews.

People are most satisfied with their jobs when their values match the culture of the organizations. If either side misrepresents itself in the interview process, then odds are people won't fit in the organizations they choose. What's the benefit in this?

This doesn't imply that a person shouldn't put his or her best foot forward. But that means exhibiting qualities that are good no matter the context—being friendly, being positive and self-confident, being qualified and competent, while still being honest.

Oh, come on. Get off your high horse. *Everybody* fudges to some degree in the process of applying for a job. If you really told the interviewer what your greatest weakness or worst mistake was, you'd never get hired. What if you answered, "I find it hard to get up in the morning and get to work"?

These sorts of "white lies" are expected and act as a kind of social lubricant in society. If we really knew what people were thinking, we'd go crazy. Moreover, you can quote all the philosophy you want, but sometimes it's necessary to lie. You mean you wouldn't lie to save the life of your family? It's naïve to think we can live in a world without lying.

Sometimes a bit of deception is necessary to get a job. I know a gay applicant who was rejected from a job he really wanted because he told the interviewer he had written two articles for gay magazines. What if he had told the interviewer a little lie? Would harm really have been done? At least he'd have a job.

As another example, when an interviewer asks you what you earned on your previous job, that information will be used against you, to pay you a salary lower than you deserve. Is it wrong to boost your salary a bit? Or would it be better to disclose your actual salary and be taken advantage of?

The same goes for complimenting interviewers, or agreeing with their opinions, and so forth. If an interviewer tells you, "We believe in community involvement," you're supposed to tell the interviewer that you have never volunteered for anything?

Of course one can go too far. We are not advocating that people totally fabricate their backgrounds. What we are talking about here is a reasonable amount of enhancement. If we can help ourselves without doing any real harm, then impression management is not the same as lying, and actually is something we should teach others.

Questions for Review

1. What is power? How do you get it?
2. Which power bases lie with the individual? Which are derived from the organization?
3. State the general dependency postulate. What does it mean?
4. What creates dependency? Give an applied example.
5. Contrast power tactics with power bases. What are some of the key contingency variables that determine which tactic a powerholder is likely to use?
6. What is a coalition? When is it likely to develop?
7. How are power and politics related?
8. Define *political behavior*. Why is politics a fact of life in organizations?
9. What factors contribute to political activity?
10. What is impression management? What types of people are most likely to engage in IM?

Questions for Critical Thinking

1. Based on the information presented in this chapter, what would you do as a recent college graduate entering a new job to maximize your power and accelerate your career progress?
2. "Politics isn't inherently bad. It's merely a way to get things accomplished within organizations." Do you agree or disagree? Defend your position.
3. You're a sales representative for an international software company. After 4 excellent years, sales in your territory are off 30 percent this year. Describe three defensive responses you might use to reduce the potential negative consequences of this decline in sales.
4. "Sexual harassment should not be tolerated at the workplace." "Workplace romances are a natural occurrence in organizations." Are both of these statements true? Can they be reconciled?
5. Which impression management techniques have you used? What ethical implications are there, if any, in using impression management?

Team Exercise

UNDERSTANDING POWER DYNAMICS

1. *Creation of groups* Each student is to turn in a dollar bill (or similar value of currency) to the instructor and students are then divided into three groups based on criteria given by the instructor, assigned to their workplaces, and instructed to read the following rules and tasks. The money is divided into thirds, giving two-thirds of it to the top group, one-third to the middle group, and none to the bottom group.
2. *Conduct exercise* Groups go to their assigned workplaces and have 30 minutes to complete their tasks.

Rules

- (a) Members of the top group are free to enter the space of either of the other groups and to communicate whatever they wish, whenever they wish. Members of the middle group may enter the space of the lower group when they wish but must request permission to enter the top group's space (which the top group can refuse). Members of the lower group may not disturb the top group in any way unless specifically invited by the top. The lower group does have the right to

knock on the door of the middle group and request permission to communicate with them (which can also be refused).

- (b) The members of the top group have the authority to make any change in the rules that they wish, at any time, with or without notice.

Tasks

- (a) *Top group*. To be responsible for the overall effectiveness and learning from the exercise and to decide how to use its money.
 - (b) *Middle group*. To assist the top group in providing for the overall welfare of the organization and to decide how to use its money.
 - (c) *Bottom group*. To identify its resources and to decide how best to provide for learning and the overall effectiveness of the organization.
3. *Debriefing* Each of the three groups chooses two representatives to go to the front of the class and discuss the following questions:
 - (a) Summarize what occurred within and among the three groups.

- (b) What are some of the differences between being in the top group and being in the bottom group?
- (c) What can we learn about power from this experience?
- (d) How accurate do you think this exercise is in reflecting the reality of resource allocation decisions in large organizations?

Source: This exercise is adapted from L. Bolman and T. E. Deal, *Exchange* 3, no. 4 (1979), pp. 38–42. Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

Ethical Dilemma

SWAPPING PERSONAL FAVORS?

Jack Grubman was a powerful man on Wall Street. As a star analyst of telecom companies for the Salomon Smith Barney unit of Citigroup, he made recommendations that carried a lot of weight with investors.

For years, Grubman had been negative on the stock of AT&T. But in November 1999, he changed his opinion. Based on e-mail evidence, it appears that Grubman's decision to upgrade AT&T wasn't based on the stock's fundamentals. There were other factors involved.

At the time, his boss at Citigroup, Sanford "Sandy" Weill, was in the midst of a power struggle with co-CEO John Reed to become the single head of the company. Meanwhile, Salomon was looking for additional business to increase its revenues. Getting investment banking business fees from AT&T would be a big plus. And Salomon's chances of getting that AT&T business would definitely be improved if Grubman would upgrade his opinion on the stock. Furthermore, Weill sought Grubman's upgrade to win favor with AT&T CEO Michael Armstrong, who sat on

Citigroup's board. Weill wanted Armstrong's backing in his efforts to oust Reed.

Grubman had his own concerns. Though earning tens of millions a year in his job, as the son of a city worker in Philadelphia he was a man of modest background. He wanted the best for his twin daughters, which included entry to an exclusive New York City nursery school (The posh 92nd Street Y [<http://www.92y.org/>])—a school that a year earlier had reportedly turned down Madonna's daughter. Weill made a call to the school on Grubman's behalf and pledged a \$1 million donation from Citigroup. At approximately the same time, Weill also asked Grubman to "take a fresh look" at his neutral rating on AT&T. Shortly after being asked to review his rating, Grubman raised it, and AT&T awarded Salomon an investment-banking job worth nearly \$45 million. Shares of AT&T soared.

Did Sandy Weill do anything unethical? How about Jack Grubman? What do you think?

Source: Based on C. Gasparino, "Out of School," *Newsweek*, January 17, 2005, pp. 38–39.

Case Incident 1

BILL FOWLER AT BLACKMER/DOVER RESOURCES INC.

Blackmer/Dover Resources' plant, in Grand Rapids Michigan, makes heavy-duty pumps designed to move commodities such as refined oil and chocolate. The plant employs 160 workers.

Historically, management assigned employees to operate the same machine for months or even years at a time. In this way, each worker became intimately familiar with a narrow task. And workers used their expertise to earn more money. Until 1997, about half the workers at the plant earned a premium, on top of their hourly wage, based on the number of pumps or pump parts they produced. The system gave them a strong incentive to conceal output-enhancing tricks they had learned, even from coworkers.

Today, the plant's workers receive a straight hourly wage. To make the plant more flexible, management encourages workers to learn a variety of jobs and accept

moves to different parts of the factory floor. Many of the plant's older workers, however, haven't welcomed the change. One of those is Bill Fowler.

Fowler is 56 years old and has worked at the Blackmer plant for 24 years. Fowler doesn't like changing jobs and he doesn't like telling anyone anything about what he does. "I don't want to move around," he says, "because I love my routine—it helps me get through the day."

Fowler's job is cutting metal shafts for industrial pumps. It's a precision task: A minor error could render a pump useless. And Fowler is outstanding at what he does. He is known for the accuracy of his cuts. His bosses also say he can be hours faster than anyone else in readying his giant cutting machines to shift from making one type of pump shaft to another. Management would love to incorporate Fowler's know-how into the manufacturing process, but he

refuses to share his secrets even with fellow workers. “If I gave away my tricks, management could use [them] to speed things up and keep me at a flat-out pace all day long,” says Fowler.

Employees like Fowler worry when they read about companies soliciting workers’ expert advice in the name of making their plants more competitive, and then turn around and move jobs to lower-wage locations in the United States or abroad. Blackmer’s top management, however, says it has no plans to relocate jobs or otherwise hurt workers. It wants merely to pool workers’ knowledge to make the plant stronger. “We’ve realized that to get com-

petitive, we need to start asking these guys what they know,” says Blackmer’s president.

Questions

1. Explain Bill Fowler’s behavior in power terms.
2. What, if anything, does this case say about trust and power?
3. What does this case say regarding implementing knowledge-management systems?
4. What, if anything, can management do to change Fowler’s behavior?

Source: This case is based on T. Aeppel, “On Factory Floors, Top Workers Hide Secrets to Success,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 2002, p. A1.

Case Incident 2

THE POLITICS OF BACKSTABBING

Scott Rosen believed that he was making progress as an assistant manager of a financial-services company—until he noticed that his colleague, another assistant manager, was attempting to push him aside. On repeated occasions, Mr. Rosen would observe his colleague speaking with their manager behind closed doors. During these conversations, Mr. Rosen’s colleague would attempt to persuade the supervisor that Mr. Rosen was incompetent and mismanaging his job, a practice that Mr. Rosen found out after the fact. Mr. Rosen recounts one specific instance of his colleague’s backstabbing efforts: When asked a question by his subordinates to which Mr. Rosen did not know the answer, his colleague would state to their supervisor, “I can’t believe he didn’t know something like that.” On other occasions, after instructing a subordinate to complete a specific task, Mr. Rosen’s colleague would say, “I wouldn’t make you do something like that.” What was the end result of such illegitimate political tactics? Mr. Rosen was demoted, an action that led him to resign shortly after, while his colleague was promoted. “Whatever I did, I lost,” recounts Mr. Rosen.

What leads individuals to behave this way? According to Judith Briles, a management consultant who has extensively studied the practice of backstabbing, a tight job market is often a contributing factor. Fred Nader, another management consultant, believes that backstabbing is the result of “some kind of character disorder.”

One executive at a technology company in Seattle admits that blind ambition was responsible for his backstabbing. In 1999, he was assigned as an external sales representative, partnered with a colleague who worked internally at their client’s office. The executive wanted the internal sales position for himself. To reach this goal, he systematically engaged in backstabbing to shatter his colleague’s credibility. Each time he heard a complaint, however small, from the client, he would ask for it in an e-mail and then forward the information to his boss. He’d include a short message about his

colleague such as: “I’m powerless to deal with this. She’s not being responsive and the customer is beating on me.” In addition, he would fail to share important information with her before presentations with their boss to convey the impression that she did not know what she was talking about. He even took backstabbing so far as to schedule meetings with their boss on an electronic calendar but then altered her version so that she was late. Eventually, he convinced his boss that she was overworked. He was transferred to the client’s office, while his colleague was moved back to the main office.

Incidents such as these may not be uncommon in the workplace. Given today’s competitive work environment, employees may be using political games to move ahead. To guard against backstabbing, Bob McDonald, a management consultant, recommends telling supervisors and other key personnel that the backstabber is not a friend. He states that this may be effective because backstabbers often claim to be friends of their victims and then act as if they are hesitant about sharing negative information with others because of this professed friendship. In any event, it is clear that employees in organizations need to be aware of illegitimate political behavior. Companies may need to adopt formal policies to safeguard employees against such behavior; however, it may be the case that behaviors such as backstabbing and spreading negative rumors are difficult to detect. Thus, both employees and managers should try to verify information to avoid the negative repercussions that can come from backstabbing and other illegitimate behaviors.

Questions

1. What factors, in addition to those cited, do you believe lead to illegitimate political behaviors such as backstabbing?
2. Imagine that a colleague is engaging in illegitimate political behavior toward you. What steps might you take to reduce or eliminate this behavior?

3. Do you believe that it is ever justifiable to engage in illegitimate political behaviors such as backstabbing? If so, what are some conditions that might justify such behavior?
4. In addition to the obvious negative effects of illegitimate political behavior on victims, such as those described in the above case, what might be some negative effects on the perpetrators? On the organization as a whole?

Source: Based on J. Sandberg, "Sabotage 101: The Sinister Art of Backstabbing," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 11, 2004, p. B.1.

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