**L5: The Politics of Change**

1. The Meaning of Politics

* Buchanan & Hucynski (2004, p. 828) - Politics are broad and vague concepts that have proved difficult to define or to measure, with precision and without ambiguity.’
* Morgan (1997) - politics are rules and there are 6 of them:

1. autocracy - power/authority vested in the hand of an individual or group of people.
2. bureaucracy - rule of law
3. technology - expert or knowledge power
4. codetermination - joint management
5. representative democracy - persons elected to position of authority to act on behalf of others
6. direct democracy - everyone has an equal right to rule or to decide

* Hardy (1994) - Politics as the “use of power”, basically this related to what Morgan said.
* Robbins (1996) - Politics as “power in action” to influence the thoughts, attitudes or behaviours of another individual or group.

What are political behaviours in organisation?

*They are those activities that are not required in the formal organisation but those (activities) that influence or attempt to influence the distribution of advantages or disadvantages within the organisation. These are part of informal hidden process and not required as part of one’s formal role. (Robbins, 1996)*

2. The Meaning of Power

* Buchanan & Hucynski (2004) - Power concerns the capacity of individuals to exert their will over others.
* Morgan (1997) - Power influences who gets what, when and how.
* Gordon (193) - Power is the potential or actual ability to influence others in a desired direction. An individual group or other social unit has power if it controls information, knowledge, or resources desired by another individual, group or social unit.
* Pfeffer (1993) - Power is defined as the potential ability to influence behaviour, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance and to get people to do things that they would otherwise not do.
* Robbins (2005) - Power refers to a capacity that A has to influence the behaviour of B, so that B acts in accordance with A’s wishes.

One common thing from all the above definitions of power is - having power means being

able to influence some else’s behaviour. There are other distinctive aspects of power

being given in the above definition of power.

Summarising, power is:

1. the potential to influence as well as the actuality of influence;
2. a function of relationships and differences between people;
3. people’s beliefs about it; and
4. how much one person has it in relation in another.

Sources of power and influence:

Position power:

1. Resource power - to give rewards or withhold or withdraw rewards
2. Invisible power - control of information; right to organise who to occupy which organisational space or to waive certain rules.
3. Non-decision-making power - to hold certain decision like agenda or programme from being made until at a right time or situation.

Personal power:

1. Expert or knowledge power - expertise or knowledge respected by others and can be used to influence others.
2. Symbolic power - to manipulate and use symbols (car, logo) to create organisational environment and the beliefs and understanding of others to meet one’s own purposes.

These are the types of powers that exist in organisations based on their structure and the roles played by those working within the organisations.

However, Jeffery Pfeller (1992) has talked about another source of power: the individual power which is derived from personal characteristics but not due to position, status or control of knowledge or resources:

* energy, endurance and physical stamina;
* ability to focus energy and to avoid wasteful effort;
* sensitivity and an ability to read and understand others;
* flexibility and selecting varied means to achieve goals;
* personal toughness; willingness to engage in conflict and confrontation;
* able to ‘play the subordinate’ and ‘team member’ to enlist the support of others.

The use of power is unlikely to succeed unless used in conjunction with the above individual power.

The Politics of Powerlessness

Powerness Powerlessness

the glass ceiling - women

- minority ethnic group

- disabled people

3. The link between Politics, Power and Conflict

Political behaviour especially those activities that undertaken to influence others not related to the formal role are important to an organisation (Robbins, 1996). People have different sets of values, beliefs and interests and they will have different opinion to the many issues that exist in the organisational life. The existence of subcultures cannot be ignored. Similarly the existence of scarce resources remains a problem even in a strong culture. People have to fight to get the scarce resources. The more power a person has to control the scarce resources the greater is his power over others. This leads to competition for more resource power and results in conflict among members in the organisation. According to Morgan (1989) conflict is a familiar feature of life in an organisational society in order to promote cooperation and competition. This kind of concept he called the ***‘pluralist frame of reference’***.

On the other hand, the ‘***unitary frame of reference’*** said that conflict should not arise in an organisation because organisations are goals directed and all organisational members are working towards their attainment. It is the responsibility of the management to ensure that conflict does not arise and if it does, to act quickly to resolve it.

With changes in the environment becoming more unpredictable or chaotic, political behaviour is expected to exist. To ignore the role of conflict whether it is helpful or dysfunctional, in the organisation and change, is to ignore the realities of human living. Therefore it is unavoidable that the pluralist frame of reference is accepted.

The unitary and pluralist views of interests, conflict and power

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | The Unitary View | The Pluralist View |
| Interests | Emphasise achievement of common objectives. Viewed organisation united under common goals and striving to the achievement of them in a well-integrated team. | Emphasise individual and group interests. The organisation is regarded as a loose coalition that has but a remote interest in the formal goals of the organisation. |
| Conflict | Regard conflicts as rare and transient phenomenon that can be removed through appropriate management action. Where it does arise it is usually attributed to the activities of deviants and troublemakers. | Regards conflict as part of an organisation’s life that has potential positive and functional aspects. |
| Power | Largely ignored the role of power in organisational life. Concepts such as authority, leadership and control tend to be preferred means of describing the managing prerogative of guiding the organisation towards the achievement of common interests. | Regards power as a crucial variable to the understanding of the activities of an organisation. Power is the medium through which conflicts of interest are alleviated and resolved. The organisation is viewed as a plurality of power holders drawing their power from a plurality of sources. |

4. Conflict in Organisations

Concept of conflict - many definitions but not a single one is comprehensive enough.

From the few definitions:

Conflict is said to exist if:

1. It is perceived by the parties to exist;
2. one party to the conflict must be perceived as about to do, or actually doing, something which the other party (parties) do not want - in other words there must be opposition;
3. some kind of interaction must take place; and
4. it can take place at a number of levels - between individuals, between groups or organisations.

Nature of conflict

All conflicts start from two types of differences (Hardy, 193):

1. The level of differences in values - due to differing goals and ideologies.

2. The level of differences in interest - due to differences about territory (departments,

areas of experience or knowledge).

Other writers listed the source of organisational conflict as follows:

1. Interdependence - organisational groupings depend on each other & when there is a difference in the power balance conflict arises.
2. Organisational structure - imbalances, more departmental differentiation, organic and mechanistic structures.
3. Rules and regulations - reduce conflict if ambiguity is reduced.
4. Limited resources - competition for the limited resources
5. Cultural differences - conflict arises
6. Environmental change - competition increases, government intervention, new technology, changing social values give rise to conflict.

**How to resolve Conflict in organisations**

***Unitary approach*** - organisations have goals and all organisational members subscribe to achieve them. Therefore any conflict should not arise and if it happens management can remove it. This is not a recommended solution. It may give rise to more problems later.

***Pluralist approach*** - every organisational member or group has interests and they may have little or no relation to the organisational goals. Conflict is unavoidable and ineradicable in an organisation. It can have positive or negative effect on the organisation. There are three ways to resolve conflict in an organisation:

1. By competition
2. By cooperation
3. By both competition and cooperation

Thomas (1976)’s “Conflict - Handling Styles” approach is a more comprehensive model to

resolve conflict.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Factors | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Assertiveness  Cooperation | low  low | some  some | high  low | low  high | high  high |
| Result | avoiding | compromising | competing | accommodating | collaborating |

Also look at Figure 5.1 (a copy attached)

See attached note on Situations in which to use the five conflict-handling styles

(Illustration 5.11).

Problems are encountered in the transition process of organisational change - whatever may be the change to take place such as fine tuning, incremental or frame-breaking; the process to get from one state to another brings the most problem. (Figure 5.2: The problems of change (attached).

***NADLER*** (1988) identified three problems in this transition process:

1. Resistance to change -people’s values and beliefs will be challenged and conflict will arise; people resist change. Political action is applied to resolve the conflict.
2. Problem with organisational control - confusion as to who is in control arises.
3. Problem with power - there is an upset in the power balance.

**Furge and Gale (1996)** provide 10 guidelines for dealing with conflict:

1. Encouraging openness - issues make known to everyone.
2. Model appropriate responses.
3. Provide summaries and restatements of the position.
4. Bring in people who are not directly involved - mediator or arbitrator.
5. Encourage people take time to think and reassess.
6. Use the strengths of the group.
7. Focus on shared goals.
8. Use directions and interests to develop areas of new gain.
9. Try to build objectivity into the process - strengths and weaknesses in the position

examined.

1. Adopt an enquiring approach to managing the conflict - the actual causes and their

relationships.

*How to resolve the ‘problem with power’* (3rd problem- Nadler, 1988) *that arises at the*

*transition process of change in the organisation?*

Nadler gave four action steps to resolve the problem with power:

1. Make sure or develop the groups who have power, support the change.
2. Make use of the behaviour of the leader (power) to get support for the change.
3. Make use of symbols and language (as power) to get support for the change.
4. Make use of stability to generate support for the change.

Analysing the potential for action of individuals or groups according to:

1. their power to block change;
2. their motivation to do so.

1. Find who holds sufficient power to assist change or to work against change (to carry

out a power audit).

2. Compare the power of any individual or group to block change with their desire or

motivation to do so.

Assess motivation to block change:

General rule: If the changes will lower the power held, then you can expect resistance to

change and vice versa.

High

A B

Potential problems Definite problems

KEEP SATISFIED ATTEMPT TO

Power to COLLABORATE

block change

C D

Few problems Potential problems

DO NOTHING KEEP INFORMED

Low

Low High

Motivation to block change

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Cell | Actions to be taken |
| C | Little power to clock change and little motivation to clock change - no immediate action to be taken. |
| B | High power to block change and high motivation to block change. Strategy is to negotiate with those concerned and if possible to reach a collaborative agreement. |
| D | High motivation to block change but low power to block change - keep them informed of change developments, persuade them to change which will bring them benefits. |
| A | High power to block change but low motivation to block change - keep them satisfied move to B |

**Review Assignment 5**

1. What is the meaning of organisational politics?

2. What do you understand by the term “power” in organisational politics?

3. What is conflict and how does it arise in organisations?

4. Discuss the proposition: “In time of change, conflict between individuals and groups is

inevitable”

5. How would you as a manager of change deal with conflict?

Case Study

Testing the rhetoric of empowerment (pp. 240-242, 2006)