

Dattner Consulting, LLC

Improving Organizational Politics

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Organizational Politics

- Definition
- Culture and Communication
- Impact on Individuals
- Effects on Work Relationships
- Organizational Learning
- Recommendations
- Conclusion

Definition

➤ Definition

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Organizational politics are the processes through which people:

- Represent different interests, agendas, and perspectives
- Compete, come in to conflict and/or collaborate in order to:
 - Interpret and evaluate information and make decisions
 - Allocate or claim scarce resources and rewards
 - Structure or restructure the organization

Culture and Communication

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In overly political organizations:

- There is a focus on individual self-interest and silos rather than on the good of the organization
- There are clearly defined in-groups and out-groups, and a preoccupation with who is in each category
 - There is a focus on singling people out for blame
 - Those in out-groups are marginalized, ignored, or dismissed
 - Rewards accrue to people for reasons other than competence or performance
 - Power and authority are not adequately distributed

Culture and Communication (continued)

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- Compliance becomes a substitute for commitment
- There is a general lack of trust
 - Instead of open dialogue, there is monitoring and surveillance
- There is a gap between rhetoric and reality
 - Plans are not put into practice
 - There is more of a focus on rituals, status and symbols than on substance
 - Rules are enforced selectively and inconsistently

Culture and Communication (continued)

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- Necessary information is:
 - Not shared due to censorship or self-censorship
 - Only partially shared
 - Shared only with selected people
 - Shared too late
 - Framed in a misleading way or deliberately falsified

Impact on Individuals

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- Decreasing loyalty and increasing focus on self interest
- Hoarding of information and control
- Stress and anxiety
- Paranoia and perceptual distortions
- Excessive worrying about status and perceived slights
- Defensiveness about errors and mistakes
- Mistrust of the validity of feedback
- Acting out and regressive behaviors

Effects on Work Relationships

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- Less willingness to disclose or be vulnerable
- Less constructive criticism and feedback
- Less pushing for clarification in ambiguous situations
- Destructive competitiveness
- Short term and transactional focus
- Relationships are negatively influenced by other relationships

Organizational Learning

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- There is an absence of good operational and financial feedback
 - Feedback is incomplete, incorrectly framed, or false
- Assumptions and theories are not reality tested
 - Costs, benefits, and risks are not evaluated
 - Escalation of commitment to failing courses of action
- There is an internal focus on the organization rather than an external focus on the competitive environment or customers

Organizational Learning (continued)

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- Resources are not efficiently deployed
- Specific goals are not set, progress is not measured, and results are not evaluated
 - It is unclear who is responsible for what
 - The wrong people are held accountable for the wrong things
 - People do not feel comfortable admitting mistakes

Organizational Learning (continued)

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- The “big picture” is ignored
 - There is a focus on short term results instead of long term progress
- Strategic initiatives take longer than they should or don't happen at all
- There is little mentoring, coaching, performance feedback or professional development

Recommendations

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Recommendations for organizations:

- Try to close the gap between rhetoric and reality by:
 - Encouraging, evaluating and rewarding collaboration
 - Creating open forums and encouraging candor
 - Deploying authority, power, and leadership
 - Ensuring transparency and objectivity of feedback and learning

Recommendations (continued)

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Recommendations for individuals

- Work within system while trying to change it
- Gingerly test the limits of openness when possible
- Make evidence- and logic- based arguments for the things that you believe are in the organization's best interest
- Take calculated risks and set a good example
- Solicit and analyze performance feedback whenever possible

Conclusion

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- Organizational life has always been and will always be characterized by politics
- The challenge for organizations is to ensure that politics do not prevent them from changing and adapting to new challenges
- The challenge for individuals is to learn how to play the game while simultaneously trying to change and improve the rules

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