Improving Organizational Politics

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Organizational Politics

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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
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)

• 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)

• 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

- 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

- 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

• 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)

- 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)

- 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

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)

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
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.