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# MANAGING INTERNAL POLITICS FOR ORGANISATIONAL SUCCESS

- Omolekan, O.J. \*

## ABSTRACT

An organization is made up of people managing and coordinating other resources for the achievement of stated objectives within an unstable and complex environment. Because people are involved and because the organization always fails to live up to its expectations in terms of rationality and objectivity, political behaviours become commonality and objectivity, political behaviours become commonplace. Politics may be positive (collaborative) or negative (destructive and competitive) but the fact is that no organization can exist without politics. The main concern of managers and organization behaviour practitioners is thus how to manage organizational politics to achieve organisational goals and objectives. That is the focus of this paper, which specifically dwells on how the organization and various citizens can cope with the political dynamics in the workplace. Politics cannot be eradicated in a workplace, but must be managed effectively to achieve the organisation's goals and objectives. The study seeks to examine the effect of organizational politics on the achievement of organization's goals and objectives and also to identify principles for managing organizational politics. Primary data was used for this study which was generated through structured questionnaires with closed ended questions. Z-test was used to test the research hypothesis. The respondents were randomly chosen from ministries within Benin City metropolis. Results of Z- test indicated that organizational politics has a significant impact on the achievement of organization's goals and objectives and that politics cannot be eradicated but must be managed effectively to achieve organisational success. Applicable recommendations were made for organizations generally.

**Key words:** Organisation, Politics, Resources, People, Organisational goals and objectives

## INTRODUCTION

Political behaviour in organizations is an activities that are not required as part of one's formal role in the organization but they are actions that influence the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organization. This problem has been nagging many employees for years and most likely it will continue to nag for years to come. Every now and then, people complain of how the mediocre and seemingly lazy employees get promoted and are strategically positioned in the organization while the competent ones are forgotten or not recognized. We often notice or hear of some underperforming employees rising while the hard working ones languish at the bottom of the ladder. Why is this so? Why does it seem difficult for one to succeed purely on merit? In some organization one can, but in many others, you must know how to play the game. You don't have to work in an organization to be familiar with organization politics. Anyone who has ever had any job, anywhere, knows that the dynamics among those who are part of the work environment play an important part in how a business is run. Apparently organizational politics is an increasing problem according to a study by Accountemps (Scout, 1998).

Organization politics is something most people recognize when they see it in action, but find difficult to define. The definition implies that organization politics is not necessarily a bad thing and it certainly isn't avoidable. Therefore we must learn to cope with it. Another problem that instigated this

\*OMOLEKAN, O.J. is a lecturer in the Economics & Business Studies, Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogwa, Nigeria.

research is how to cope with organizational politics knowing that it is unavoidable. In any game, in order to succeed one must know the rules and for organizational politics, the stakes are quite high; succeed and you get to keep your job or get promoted -- lose and you may be roaming the streets looking for a new job. When dealing with organizational politics, having a set of guidelines is a good idea.

Politics may be positive (collaborative) or negative (destructive and competitive) but the fact is that no organization can exist without politics. The main concern of managers and organization behaviour practitioners is thus how to manage organizational politics. That is the focus of this paper, which specifically dwells on how the organization and various citizens can cope with the political dynamics in the workplace.

## CONCEPT OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

Politics within organizations is commonplace because organizations have failed to operate as expected. Rights, responsibilities and authorities are not clearly spelt out; resources and privileges are not distributed rationally and there is little performance reward parity. Organizational citizens thus have to jostle, to scheme and politick so as to make the best out of their work life; to improve their pay, status or authority within the organization. Organizational politics has been severally defined from the above perspective.

Organizational politics involves those activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop and use power and other resources to obtain ones preferred outcomes in a situation where there is uncertainty or disagreement' (McAfee & Champagne, 1987); it 'consists of intentional acts of influence undertaken by individuals or group to enhance or protect their interest when conflicting courses of action are possible' (Muo, 2004); the purpose is to confront others to gain their compliance by manipulative actions... to shape conscious and unconscious organizational values, beliefs and practice. Resistance is reduced by political action (Bass, 1990). It is also defined as 'those activities that are not required as part of one's formal role in organization, but that influence or attempt to influence, the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organization (Farrell and Peterson, 1982). We are thus talking of actions taken to achieve motives that are not disclosed to others at that point in time.

There are however other subtle manifestations of power and politics prevalent in organizations. These include getting extra budgetary approvals, obtaining above average salary increments and other perquisites of office for one's subordinates, easy and regular access to decision makers, getting advance information on policy propositions and plans, interceding on behalf of troubled staff and getting desirable placement for subordinates (Yukl, 1981). These moves may or may not be for selfish purposes.

## POLITICAL ACTIONS: OVERALL BENEFITS TO THE ORGANIZATION

But all political actions are not just selfish; they may well be to the overall benefit of the organization. Using formal authority to achieve organizational politics; it involves the application of power. Units within an organization also acquire and exercise power over others. This power is acquired through access to scarce resources, ability to cope with uncertainty and thus be in a position to help others out of that uncertainty, ability to influence the work of others through positions in the workflow and when they perform essential functions that cannot be performed or completed by others (Eze, 2004). In effect, there are two dimensions of organizational politics namely: Using legitimate means and / or manipulating people, processes and organizational resources to achieve selfish interests. This is selfish, manipulative and mostly seen as negative; and by passing official channels, persuading, and/ or influencing others or negotiating with them in the process of achieving

corporate objectives. This is collaborative and mostly perceived as positive (Muio, 2004). It is important to note that people mostly relate organizational politics to manipulative activities to protect /promote selfish interests. It should also be noted that the organization itself is not a political. It does everything possible to befriend the government and its officials so as to derive some benefits or avoid some pains from government activities and in activities.

### ACRITIQUE OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

What is the impact of politics in the work place? Some people use political strategies to serve parochial interests; some do that by destroying or at the expense of others, while some do so in ways that are harmless; some people use politics to enhance organizational fortunes or even to protect other members who are being harassed unduly by other political actors. So, whether politics is good or bad depends on the type and motive of the political action and the person performing the evaluation.

On the one hand, organizational politics is seen as destructive individuals from their duties, promoting wrong values, disorganizing the compensation system, frustrating and leading to sub-optimal staff placements. A study by the Director/ Roffey Park Institute (2002) catalogues the negative impact of organizational politics as including reduction in productivity, destruction of morale, heightening competition conflict and distrust, discouraging knowledge sharing and excluding key people from decision-making, reducing faith in top management, leading to loss of valuable talent and improper recognition and reward of merit. Organizational politics is also the major cause of conflicts in the workplace. In fact, competitive political behaviour is generally regarded as bad. These are behaviours classified as negative games; played to destroy or eliminate the other player, e.g. using dubious means to cause a colleague's dismissal or even death (Eze, 2004).

Mintzberg (1998) summarizes the dysfunctional aspects of organizational politics thus: Politics is divisive and costly; it burns up energies that could instead go into operations. It can also lead to all kinds of aberrations. Politics is often used to sustain outmoded systems of power and sometimes to introduce new ones that are not justified. Politics can also paralyze the organization to the point where its effective functioning comes to a halt and nobody benefits. The purpose of an organization, after all, is to produce goods and services, not to provide an arena in which people can fight one another.

On the other hand, organizational politics keeps the system going through positively oriented coalitions, negotiations and tradeoffs, which ensure that the organization moves on. It also enhances the ability to survive the various bobby-traps in the external environment especially, politically and macro-economically. It enables people to move ahead while making it easier for leaders to lead; provides alternative channels of information and promotion, ensures that all sides of an issue are fully debated, stimulates desired changes that are usually blocked by legitimate influences and eases the path for the execution of decisions. Another generalization is to see collaborative politics as good.

These are behaviours classified as positive games: mostly played to achieve survival, or mutually beneficial goals and without bitterness (Eze, 2004). However, whether we like it or not, it is impossible to eliminate political behaviours in organizations, the concern should thus be on how to make the best of the situation. As Robbins (2003) argues some people view both power and politics with suspicion. They associate politics with shady behind-the-scene deals and back-stabbing. Yet, both power and politics are tools that people use to influence others; both can be used ethically for perfectly legitimate ends. Moreover since it is difficult to imagine an organization that is completely free of political behaviour, it makes sense for managers to focus on how to use politics to improve the organization and promote its goals rather than on how to eliminate politics.

## COPING WITH POLITICS IN THE WORK PLACE

Political behaviour is an inescapable reality in the work place. It may be bad or good depending on the purpose and method applied and being ethical about it is one of the ways of making it beneficial to all stakeholders. The issue however still remains how the various parties should cope with organizational politics. We shall discuss this issue in this segment of the papers as it affects the organization itself, steps that should be taken by all irrespective of status, and suggestions for the leader and the managers/ other staff within the organization. But before doing that, it is important to reiterate once more that we cannot eliminate politics in the workplace.

### For the Organization

The major ways for an organization to manage organizational politics is to reduce the factors that create fertile ground for politicking in the workplace. This ensures that people get what they are entitled to and that objective standards are applied in corporate affairs. The organisation should also ensure that gains from destructive politicking are not allowed to stand and that politics-where it must be played is done ethically, so as to promote overall corporate interest and goodwill. Specifically, organizations should manage and minimize politics in the workplace and mitigate the negative consequences throughout the following steps (Ekpenyong, 1995):

- a. The corporate vision, mission, values and objectives should be clearly articulated and popularized so that everybody knows always, where the company stands and where it is going. Getting everybody involved in their articulation ensures general understanding and acceptance.
- b. There should be clarity about roles, authorities, responsibilities and relationships. This ensures that everybody knows where he stands and what is expected of/from him at all times.
- c. The decision making process should be transparent - everybody knows pending decisions; the decision making policies and criteria should be clear and open; and enough time should be allowed for decisions except in cases of genuine emergency. Appraisal systems should be transparent and objective with rewards related to performance.
- d. The disciplinary procedure should be clearly articulated and popularized.
- e. Resource allocation processes should also be properly articulated so that at any moment, everybody knows the basis of recent and future resource decisions.

In effect, there is need to enthrone /transparency and minimize uncertainty/ ambiguity in all facets of the organization's operations.

### For everybody - both the leaders and the led

Ethics has become a critical success factor in today's business environment. But the question for ethics goodness, fairness, and rightness of actions- is not easy to define. It usually depends on surrounding circumstances and the ethical mood of the society at the time of action. However, a manager can measure the fairness of his action by truthfully answering these questions (Eze, 2004).

- What will your position be if roles were reversed- if you were at the receiving end?
- How consistent is your action between those who are close to you and those who are not?
- Can the action be applied to everybody?
- Can an impartial spectator approve of your action?

**Criterion of utilitarian outcome:** the action results in the greatest good for the greatest number-both

within and outside the organization.

**Criterion of individual rights:** the action respects the basic rights of the affected person (free consent/ speech, privacy, due process and freedom of conscience).

**Criteria of distributive justice:** respects the rules of justice by treating people equally and fairly, not discriminatorily and arbitrarily.

**Criterion of overwhelming factors:** This is an exception; it applies when the action can not satisfy these three criteria because of conflict amongst the criteria (an action with good and bad sides), conflict within the criteria (like using a bad means to achieve a good objectivity) or inability to apply the criteria/ like behaviour based on inaccurate and incomplete information).

Hodge and Anthony (1991) however argue that the question is not the ethics of politics but ensuring that the tactics are ethically applied. He is of the opinion that the five broad categories of power can be utilized in organizations in such a way as not to compromise the ethical standards of fairness and justness. He reiterates the following guidelines for ethical use of power popularized by Yuki (1981):

**Legitimate Power:** Be cordial, polite, clear and confident; follow up to verify understanding, make sure requests are appropriate and explain reason for it; follow proper channels, exercise, power regularly and enforce compliance; be sensitive to subordinates' concerns.

**Reward Power:** Make reasonable, feasible ethical and proper requests; verify compliance; offer rewards as desired by subordinates but these rewards must be credible.

**Coercive Power:** Inform subordinates of rules and penalties warn before punishing and punish consistently/ uniformly; understand before acting and maintain credibility; punish in private and ensure offence-punishment parity.

In coping with politics the following suggestions are useful (Offermann, 2004):

- a. Keep vision and values in the front burner, it is easier to be led astray if you are uncertain about where you are going.
- b. Encourage rational dissent so that opinions are tested against each other. Do not frighten dissenters who may tell you the truth; cultivate truth-tellers.
- c. When delegating, have a clear framework for performance evaluation and feedback; remember always that delegation is not synonymous with dereliction.
- d. Set good examples; people will manipulate you if you are manipulative. If you encourage unethical conducts, you reap unethical conducts.
- e. Honour your intuition; if you think you are being manipulated, you are probably right. Apart from knowing whom to delegate to, it is also critical to know what and what not to delegate; the boss must perform certain tasks.
- f. Do not judge people on competence and intelligence alone; consider their ethical and moral fiber.
- g. Beware when you are being asked to act on the spur of the moment because 'it is

urgent'. That urgency may be contrived!

## PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

These principles include the following:

- a. The leader should ensure that the structures put in place to minimize uncertainty and enthrone transparency are strictly adhered to and updated in line with current realities.
- b. He should realize that whatever he does dictates the tone in the organization. He should therefore model the ideal ethical and political behaviours in the organization and this should not include practicing destructive, competitive politics.
- c. He should take steps to reduce competition in the workplace especially as it relates to resources.
- d. The leader should also break or neutralize political freedoms by transfers, relocations, exiling and other normal administrative procedures.
- e. Staffs who are political experts should also be neutralized and efforts made to ensure that they do not benefit from their politicking. Such people should be placed at arms length.
- f. The leader should also prevent the emergence of future political turfs by striking preemptively and by dis-empowering extremely political operatives (Beeman & Sharkey, 1987).
- g. The leader should obtain information for decisions and strategic analysis, choice and evaluation from various sources.
- h. The leader should enthrone an open communication culture so that everybody knows what is on. Let everybody know what you are planning to do, what you are doing, and why /how you are doing it. In that case nobody can manipulate information for selfish purposes (Moorehead & Griffen, 1992).

## METHODOLOGY

The research hypothesis state that:

H1: Organizational politics has a significant impact on the achievement of organizations goals and objectives.

H0: Organizational politics does not have a significant impact on the achievement of organizations goals and objectives.

The data used for this study was primary data generated through structured questionnaire. The questions in the questionnaires were closed ended questions. The response format employed a 3 point Likert scale as follows: 3 - Strongly Agree; 2 Agree; 1 Disagree. Three hundred questionnaires were administered to some selected ministries within Benin City metropolis such as Ministry of health, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Works. Out of three hundred questionnaires distributed only two hundred and fifty were administered and returned. The selection was based on convenience sampling i.e. those respondents the researcher was able to penetrate and influenced.

Z test at 95% confidence interval was used to test the formulated hypothesis because the sample size is greater than 30 and it is applicable if the population variance is known or unknown.

Thus, if Z calculated is greater than Z critical value, we reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and accept the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) and vice versa if reverse is the case. Z test formula is given as;

$$Z = \frac{\bar{x} - \mu}{\frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}} \quad \text{where } \bar{x} = \text{sample mean} \quad \sigma = \text{standard deviation}$$

$$\mu = \text{Population mean} \quad n = \text{sample size}$$

$$Z = \text{Probability from the table (ie 1.96)}$$

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

**TABLE 1: Organizational politics is a common phenomenon in your organization**

| Responses      | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree | 203       | 80.4           |
| Agree          | 43        | 17.2           |
| Disagree       | 4         | 1.6            |
| Total          | 250       | 100            |

*Source: Researcher field work 2012*

From table 1 above, it was revealed that 98.4% of the respondents agree that organizational politics is very rampant in their organization while 1.6% disagrees with the statement. With this figure, it is glaring that organizational politics is predominant in the organization.

**TABLE 2: Organizational politics has strong link with scarcity of resources.**

| Responses      | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree | 100       | 40             |
| Agree          | 137       | 54.8           |
| Disagree       | 13        | 5.2            |
| Total          | 250       | 100            |

*Source: Researcher field work 2012*

Based on the table 2 above, we can infer that 40% of the respondents are strongly agreed that a link exist between organizational politics and scarcity of resources. This proposition was also supported by 54.8% of the respondents while 5.2% disagree.

**TABLE 3: Poverty and Unemployment as a cause of organisational politics**

| Responses      | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree | 139       | 55.6           |
| Agree          | 100       | 40             |
| Disagree       | 11        | 4.4            |
| Total          | 250       | 100            |

*Source: Researcher field work 2012*

Table 3 above shows that 95.6% of the total respondents agree that poverty and unemployment are very high in our society. Thus, this may be one of the reasons while politics is predominating in most of our organization.

**TABLE 4: Organizational politics cannot be eliminated.**

| Responses      | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree | 50        | 20             |
| Agree          | 150       | 60             |
| Disagree       | 50        | 20             |
| Total          | 250       | 100            |

*Source: Researcher field work 2012*

From the table 4 above, it was observed that politics in an organization cannot be eradicated. With this, manager needs to design strategies and means of using the politics within the organization to achieve stated goals and objectives.

**TABLE 5: Organizational politics has a significant impact on the achievement of organizational goals and objectives.**

| Responses      | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree | 195       | 78             |
| Agree          | 35        | 14             |
| Disagree       | 20        | 8              |
| Total          | 250       | 100            |

*Source: Researcher field work 2012*

From table above, it was revealed that organizational politics has a strong impact on the achievement of enterprise goals and objectives. This is supported by 92% of the respondent. Though, this is achievable if the politics within the organization can be well managed.

**TABLE 6: Political leaders interferes in to the private sector**

| Responses    | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| Very cordial | 129       | 51.6           |
| Cordial      | 42        | 16.8           |
| Not cordial  | 48        | 19.2           |
| Can't say    | 31        | 12.4           |
| Total        | 250       | 100            |

*Source: Researcher field work 2012*

From table 6 above, it was revealed that political leaders interfere in to the private sector. This undue interference has its strong effect on national economy.

**TABLE 7: Organizational politics has its good sides, if its can be effectively manage.**

| Responses         | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 198       | 79.2           |
| Agree             | 2         | 0.8            |
| Strongly Disagree | 50        | 16.8           |
| Total             | 250       | 100            |

*Source: Researcher field work 2012*

Table 7 above shows that the organizational politics has its positive effect only if the management of the organization can manage politics effectively. Effective management of organizational politics can leads to the achievement of organizations goals and objectives.

## TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

To test the hypothesis, question 5 was chosen. The Z test at 95% confidence interval analysis of hypothesis is shown in the table below:

| X        | F   | Fx  | x-x  | (x-x) <sup>2</sup> | F(x-x) <sup>2</sup> |
|----------|-----|-----|------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 3        | 195 | 585 | 0.3  | 0.09               | 17.6                |
| 2        | 35  | 70  | -0.7 | 0.49               | 17.2                |
| 1        | 20  | 20  | -1.7 | 2.89               | 57.8                |
| $\Sigma$ | 250 | 675 |      |                    | 92.6                |

Source: Researcher's computation, 2012

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\Sigma fx}{\Sigma f} = \frac{675}{250} = 2.7 \quad \delta = \frac{\sqrt{92.6}}{250} = \sqrt{0.37} = 0.6083$$

$$\begin{aligned} N &= \bar{x} \pm Z(\delta/\sqrt{n}) = 2.7 \pm 1.96 (0.6083/\sqrt{250}) \\ &= 2.7 \pm 1.96 (0.03848) \\ &= 2.7 \pm 0.0754 \\ &= 2.7754 \text{ or } 2.6246 \end{aligned}$$

Going by the formulae  $Z = \frac{\bar{x} - N}{\delta/\sqrt{n}}$

$$\begin{aligned} &\frac{2.7 - 2.7754}{0.03848} \\ &= -1.964 \end{aligned}$$

OR

$$\begin{aligned} &\frac{2.7 - 2.6246}{0.03848} \\ &= 1.964 \end{aligned}$$

From the result obtained above, the z calculated was 1.964 and Z tabulated at 95% confidence interval is 1.96. Since z calculated is greater than z tabulated. Thus, it is concluded that Organizational politics has a significant impact on the achievement of organizational goals and objectives.

## CONCLUSION

Political behaviours are considerations dominant define and redefine the shape of organizational decisions and actions in Nigeria. The perception of political determinism is such that even when one obtains anything by merit, there is always the feeling that somebody somewhere must have facilitated it. In fact people start their search for anything in any organization by looking for somebody who knows somebody ... and that is even when they are eminently qualified for whatever they are seeking. Organizational politics is predominant in Nigeria because the macro political environment is built and continues to thrive upon intrigues and manipulations; there is acute poverty, resource scarcity and unemployment. Anybody in any position of authority is seen as representing 'his peoples' interest and such, he is expected to favour the group in question; the level of corruption and moral decay is very embarrassing with low concern for integrity; the political leadership also throws their weight about and even interferes in the private sector where they enthrone cronies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizational politics is not a Nigerian phenomenon; it is a universal affair and it cannot be eliminated. For this reason(s) the following recommendations are presented:

- a. Managers should possess sound knowledge and skills required to manage the political dynamics of their organization to achieved the pre determined goal.
- b. It is advisable that whatever one does in whatever position, destructive politics should be avoided because those playing destructive politics would one day become victims.
- c. It is advisable to be ethical about politics and to ensure that the methods and motives are favourable to the collective interest of the organization and the staff.

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