



Organizational Leadership

Managing Conflict, Power and Politics

Rosendo Flores	1010429
Margarita Sanchez	434420
Claudia Terzi	1010470



Agenda

1. Conflict

2. Power

3. Politics



Conflict

An issue that generates the most emotion, and frustrated comments.

We generally tend to think about conflict as:

- unpleasant
- counter-productive
- time-consuming

But conflict might be an opportunity.....

The notion that conflict should be avoided is one of the major contributors to the growth of destructive conflict in the workplace.

Conflict that occurs in organizations need not be destructive.

If directed and managed so that it causes both people and organizations to grow, innovate and improve.

However, managing conflict effectively requires that all parties understand the nature of conflict in the workplace.



Conflict

There are three ways of looking at organizational conflict:

- The Bad
- The Good
- The Ugly

Each of these ways is linked to a different set of assumptions about the purpose and function of organizations.



Conflict

The Bad

The dysfunctional view of organizational conflict is imbedded in the notion that organizations are created to achieve goals by creating structures that perfectly define job responsibilities, authorities, and other job functions.

This traditional view of organizations values orderliness, stability and the repression of any conflict that occurs.

This view of organizations and conflict causes problems.

Unfortunately, most of us, consciously or unconsciously, value some of the characteristics of this "orderly" environment.

Problems arise when we do not realize that this way of looking at organizations and conflict only fits organizations that work in routine ways where innovation and change are virtually eliminated.

Trying to "structure away" conflict and disagreement in a dynamic environment requires tremendous amounts of energy, and will also suppress any positive outcomes that may come from disagreement, such as improved decision-making and innovation.



Conflict

The Good

The functional view of organizational conflict sees conflict as a productive force, one that can stimulate members of the organization to increase their knowledge and skills, and their contribution to organizational innovation and productivity.

This approach considers that the keys to organization success lie not in structure, clarity and orderliness, but in creativity, responsiveness and adaptability.

The successful organization **NEEDS** conflict so that diverging views can be put on the table, and new ways of doing things can be created.

The functional view of conflict also suggests that conflict provides people with feedback about how things are going.

However, this requires that conflict not be repressed, since attempts to repress are more likely to generate very ugly situations



Conflict

The Ugly

Ugly occurs when the manager (and perhaps employees) attempt to eliminate or suppress conflict in situations where it is impossible to do so.

You know you have ugly in your organization when:

- Many conflicts run for years
- People have given up on resolving and addressing conflict problems
- There is a good deal complaining but little attempt to fix the problem
- Staff show little interest in working to common goals, but spend more time and energy on protecting themselves

When we get "ugly" occurring in organizations, there is a tendency to look to the manager or formal leader as being responsible for the mess.

In fact, that is how most employees would look at the situation.

It is true that managers and supervisors play critical roles in determining how conflict is handled in the organization, but it is also true that the avoidance of ugliness must be a shared responsibility.



Power

Conflict in organizations often reflects interpersonal sources of power held and use by managers, subordinates, and coworkers

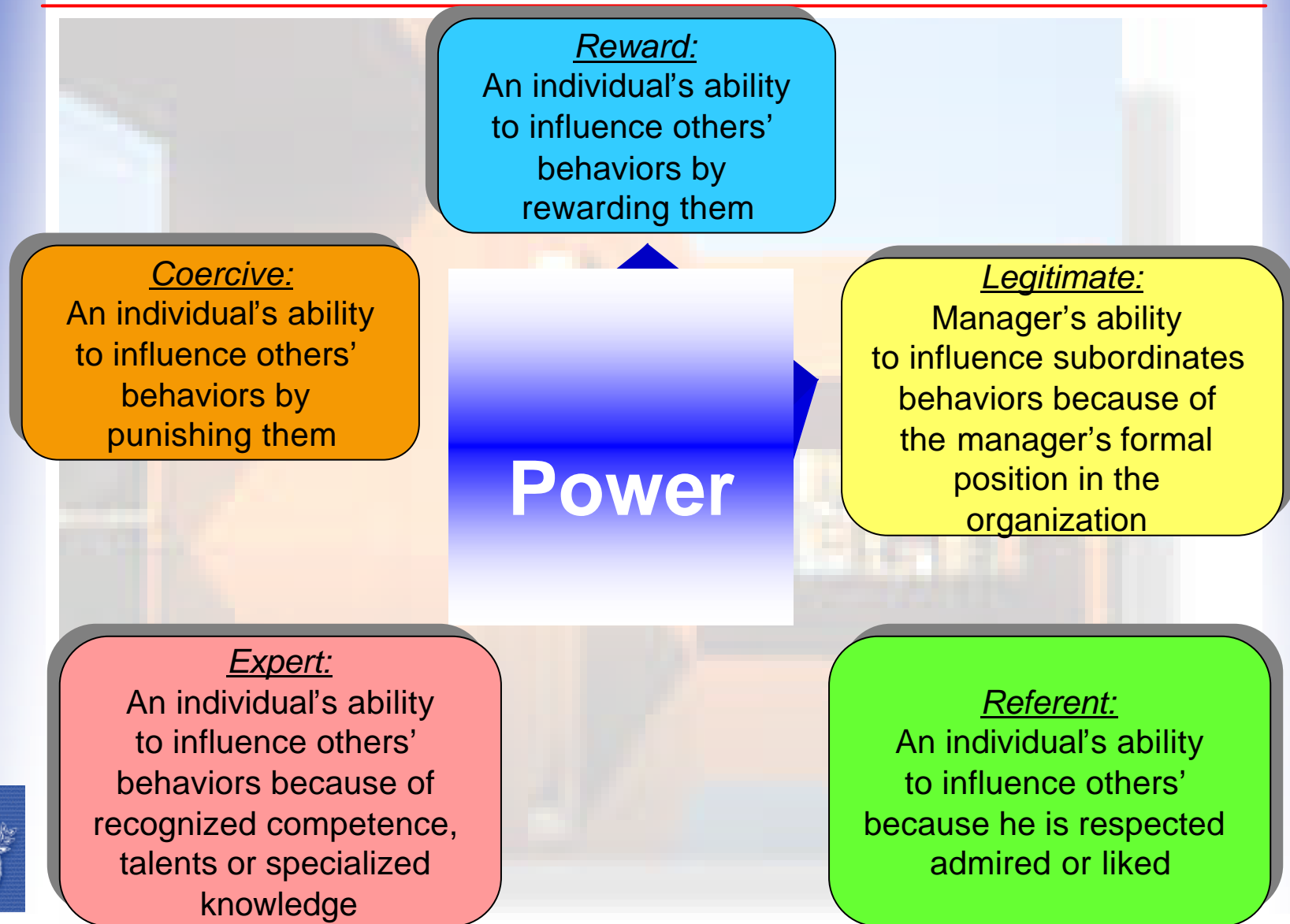
Power is the leader's potential to influence over followers

5 Sources of power

1. Reward Power
2. Coercive Power
3. Legitimate Power
4. Expert Power
5. Referent Power



Power



Power

Effective leaders rely more on expert and referent power to influence subordinates.

Referent power is use to achieve leader's objectives

Effective leaders use a mix of different types of power



Power

Acquiring and Losing Power

Social exchange Theory

Social interaction is an exchange of benefits or favors, which include material benefits such as expression of approval, respect and affection.

Each member of small group has a status position

Group members specially watch the manager, because they each have expectations of the leader. If the leader meets follower expectations, power is acquired and maintained

Strategic Contingencies Theory

Power of organizational units depends on three things:

- Expertise in coping with important problems
- Centrality of the unit within the work flow
- The extent to which the unit expertise is unique rather than substitutable



Politics

Political behavior in organizations focuses on using power to achieve desired results in circumstances of conflict and choices. Political behavior can be viewed as unofficial and outside accepted channels of authority. It is a unsanctioned behavior to reach a goal. In many occasions such goals can be individual aims and not organizational. Nevertheless political behavior can be directed to reach organization's benefits.

Political behavior can be used as the bases of power and it flows within the dynamics of power. A person who is perusing power needs to involved in an organization's political process. A behavior that influences other people while controlling a final result and features high levels of conflict can be described as political behavior. Political tactics are implemented to adopt a certain project.



Politics

Political behavior can be used to affect decisions, reach scarce resources and earn the cooperation of persons that are outside direct authority. Employees in an organization hold different perceptions of political behavior, recognizing the presence of dominant groups and reward practices.

Political behavior is present when managers compete for resource allocation. An other example of political behavior is when managers negotiate with managers of earlier work units to reach an efficient work flow.

There is an interdependence in the work flow. Managers of some work units are dependent on other units. The success in the work process depends on the relationships between the units.

Political behavior can institutionalize power holders. It can include political process in the organization's cultural framework. People in power construct organizational structure, develop policies and establish information systems that at the same time support their power bases.



Politics

Political Strategies

A political strategy is an established plan to reach a goal within the use of political tactics. A political strategy can use a mix of tactics according with the political landscape. Decision making processes can involve different political dimensions.

A decision maker can exercise its power in order to emphasize his favorite alternative. It deals with a plan that recognizes changes in the political context.

Strategies involve all levels of an organization.

Political Strategies have been documented in the following areas:

- Decisions concerning resource allocation
- Development of a person's career
- Performance appraisals
- Pay increase choices
- Organizational change



Politics

A political diagnosis helps understanding power in an organization and also it provides an insight of the political behavior. It identifies coalitions in an organization and individuals that participate actively in the organization's political processes. Political networks are based from alliances of individuals and coalitions. Political networks can control information and resources throughout the organization. A political diagnosis identifies strategic positions and identifies the individuals who are present in the decision- making processes and play a key political role in major decisions.

International Aspects of Political Behavior in Organizations

Persons from different cultures have different beliefs concerning power. Some cultures see directive and autocratic use of power as appropriate. There is the case other cultures that see a more democratic approach as correct. Cultural differences affect the use of power and the political behavior. Different ideas within different cultures influence beliefs about power relationships. Cultures vary consistently in respect to their orientation toward uncertainty. Some cultures value a reduction of uncertainty, while some other cultures see uncertainty as a part of organizational life.



Politics

Ethics and political behavior

Power and political behavior must not violate another person's rights. Politics and power need to be exercised within an ethical context. Ethics and political behavior in organizations must include the following characteristics:

- The political behavior should serve people beyond the single political actor
- Individuals should clearly know the intent of the person and give their free consent to participate in any project.
- The administration should allow fair treatment of all affected people.
- Such political behavior should serve also people outside the organizational framework.
- Using power and political behavior to serve only one's self-interest is unethical
- Using political behavior to violate a person's rights is unethical.



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