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CHAPTER 9

THE POWER AND POLITICS IN ORGANIZATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

It's so obvious that beyond in all social entities, politics are peculiar to organizations as well. Within the concept of individuals' personality diversity in organizations, the individual and contextual differences in political behaviors highly depend on the perception of power and politics of the employees in organizations. In addition, organizations simply operate by distributing authority and roles and creating a stage for the exercise of power so employees are usually eager to secure and use power to seek a familiar and hospitable environment in organizations. Since power is a basic force of human interaction and individuals come to work with various goals, it's so common that these goals end up with conflicts and competition among employees because of the expenditure or distribution of scarce resources in organizations. It's obvious that politics are at the core of public life and so in organizations. As a result, the existence and the various types of politics and power are endemic to organizations.

Besides, it can be inferred that distribution of power is often apparent in organizations and organizations are political structures that provide opportunities for individuals to develop careers and establish an environment for the expression of individual interests and motives at workplaces. In sum, Fleming and Spicer (2014) described power as the possibility that an individual within a social or organizational structure tries to pursue his/her goal or personal interest despite any resistance. And, it has been defined that politics is the tactics and strategies individuals use to articulate this power or attempt to resist it,

especially when goals and interests in the organization are conflicted. Thus, it has been mentioned that organizational politics is still usually viewed as dirty “backstabbing” types of behavior, involving backroom deals, and the improper and irrational influence over other people in the organizations. Therefore, the power and politics in organizations will be studied in more detail in this chapter.

1. THE POWER IN ORGANIZATIONS

Individuals use various ways to exercise power upon others and to negotiate the political interactions within organizations. Workplace is such a political arena in which employees are often faced with situations in which they should choose how to react to others that use power in the ways they do not prefer, adopt or support. Power can simply be defined as get someone to do something as the way you want done or the ability to influence the behavior of other people to get what you want. Additionally, power is associated with someone’s ability to allocate resources, and command over other individuals and commanding others mainly depends upon the ability to make other individuals do something they, on the other hand, never think of doing that. It’s so obvious that every organization has its own working environment and way of getting things done and when anyone starts a new job it’s vital that he/she should be well aware of that. In this sense, power games that were formed long before anyone starts a new position at a workplace because power games have already been in play and the new comer’s success will base on how well he/she can interpret the power games especially dealing with positional power,

resources and rewards and can select best options to respond them appropriately.

As a definition, power is the potential ability to influence behavior and to change the sequence or course of actions, to deal with the resistance and to get individuals to do things that they would otherwise never do at any time and politics and influence are the processes, the intentions, actions or the behaviors through which this potential power is used or realized in organizations. Besides, it has been argued that power is utilized more when encountering moderate interdependence and there is often no need to exercise power or influence upon others especially with little or no interdependence. On the other hand, when the interdependence is at higher levels individuals gave incentives to work together, pursue joint goals and develop cooperation and begin to coordinate their activities in organizations and when they ignore the incentives they might fail organizationally or individually in the end. Meanwhile, since interdependence is the main outcome of many things, the most critical matter is the scarcity of resources in organizations and while slack resources reduce interdependence, scarcity increases it in organizations (Pfeffer, 1994, 35-38). According to Hinck and Conrad (2018) when individuals or group of people employ their communicative abilities and strategies in order to influence others in ways that fulfill what they perceive are their own interests, within the process of insisting their wishes on less powerful individuals in the organization and from a traditional point of view, power is an instrument that endures independent of actors' perceptions and is more readily available to some people than others. In brief,

power is the capacity which A has to influence the perception and behavior of B so that B behaves or acts as the way A wishes especially when A possesses something that B requires or if B thinks that he/she is dependent on A so A has power on B. Figure 1 displays the interaction of power of A on B:

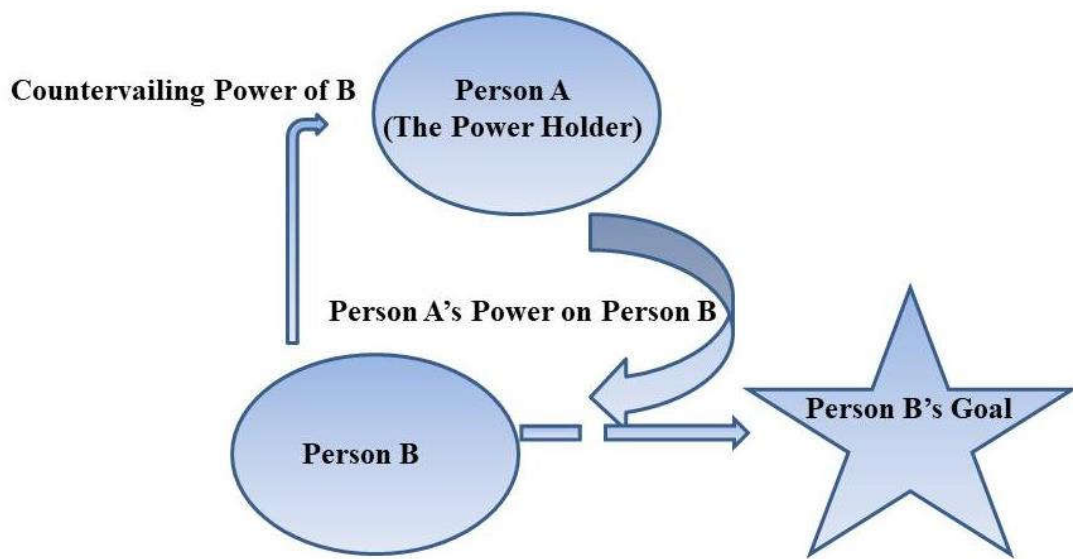


Figure 1. The Power Interaction in Organizations

Geppert et al. (2016) underlined Weber's point of view about power as to get others to do what you want them to do and if necessary against their will in their study and they also reminded Marxist expression that the rulers are in power and will stay in power provided that they are able to manipulate the 'real interests' of the ruled. They also stated in their study that there are four main 'faces' of organizational power that are coercion, manipulation, domination and subjectification. To make them clear, it has been concluded as coercion is associated with the one-dimensional idea of power and determined as immediate 'mobilization of power' by the individuals,

manipulation is associated with the two-dimensional idea power and refers to the attempts to ensure action and discussion occurs within accepted boundaries, domination, refers to the attempts to make relations of power seem inevitable and natural and the last one subjectification defines to form sense of self, experience and emotions and existed at the 'deeper' or 'systemic power level. From an organizational theory point of view, Fairholm (2009) remarked that power is both an enigma and a central theme in organization theory since it's a significant feature of formal and informal relationships at workplaces and it has both social and psychological dimensions. It's so clear that the organization is a social grouping that consists of at least two people involved in some common initiatives with pre-established goals, structure and methods. Indeed the allocation of power and the system of power planning in place in the organization have a substantial effect on the kind of adjustment individuals make or can make in the organization to achieve their goals and desires, the needs for achievements, power or affiliation. So since the organizational construct is in every respect one of power it cannot be considered as organization is apart from the idea of power. In sum, these three power use theory below define the three theoretical constructs:

- 1- Exchange Theory: Power within the concept of symmetry-asymmetry, as systems of control over information and affection just like an aspect of prestige. Power is a balancing of values hold by competing participants in an exchange relationship since it has been regarded as the organization is center of exchanging

the goods and services, information and insight to achieve both the individual and organizational goals or outcomes.

2-Alignment Theory: The idea of alignment depends upon the organizational culture and the culture, customs and traditions should be compatible with the individuals in some real ways and cultures that concentrate on a central power figure outline the power dynamic more than do cultures concentrating on position, task or role though power use is integral to the relationships in organizations.

3-Contingency Theory: The effects and force of contingencies in the environment on organizational and individual capacity to obtain goals are so real and paths of contingency have an effect on power use so identification and acquiring control over the critical contingencies becomes an essential reason of power use in organizations.

Additionally Omisore and Nweke (2014) indicated in their study that power is the ability to apply force and mobilize resources, energy, capacity and information on behalf of preferred goals and it has been underlined that there are various bases for using information in organizations and six major bases of power have been listed as coercion, expertise, rewards, legitimacy, referent power and information. Figure 2 displays the six key bases of power in detail:

 Bases of Power in Organizations	
COERCION	This implies the threat of decreasing another's outcomes. The holder can apply punishment or sanction.
EXPERTISE	This is formal or specialized knowledge about particular issues or activities with an organization. The person with expertise has the status of an expert and thus is likely to be accurate.
REWARDS	This implies the promise of increasing the outcomes of the employer. The holder of this can give or withhold something desired.
LEGITIMACY	The holder of this power is viewed as right in terms of the values of the one influenced; this is tantamount to authority. Authority is power based on rights of control and concomitant obligations to obey
REFERENT POWER	This is more interpersonal in nature than legitimacy and power based on identification with another. This is exemplified by the power of charismatic leaders who elicit deference and are accorded credibility by others. The individual influenced desires to model his/her behavior to the source of influence.
INFORMATION	This consists of the access or opportunity actors have to gain information about the inner workings of the organization or about the relation of the organization to the environment. This information may or may not be related to the actor's level in the hierarchy of authority in the organization.

Figure 2. The Six Major Bases of Power (Omisore, and Nweke, 2014:167)

According to the Shafritz et al. (2014) it has been emphasized that the effectiveness that power brings evolves from two main ways that the first one is access to resources, information and the second one is the capacity or skill have cooperation in carrying out what is necessary especially in managerial process. For example, during the decision-making process in a meeting or in a committee, the person who is in charge of the department or organization or who directs the meeting or keeps the minutes can have significant power to control decision making process at that time. In addition, it has been maintained that there are some certain symbols of a manager's organizational power that influences upward and outward especially to what extent a manager:

- 1- can intercede favorably on behalf of somebody who has some problems with the organization,
- 2- can get a favorable placement for a more talented coworker or a subordinate,
- 3- can get confirmation for the spending beyond the organizational planned budget,
- 4- can get above-average income raises for the subordinates,
- 5- can get items on the agenda at policy meetings,
- 6- can get faster access to top decision-makers in organization,
- 7- can get regular, instant and closely contact to top decision-makers,
- 8- can get earlier or more instant information about administrative decisions and policy shifts.

Hence, Gencer et al. (2018) maintained in their study that since power is a source or a kind of force reserve engage in tactics and used by anyone effectively to influence or change the attitude and behavior of another one then the concept of power is the core of the interest of individuals for management and organization. Wilson (1995) stated that power is a core function of the structure in organizations and power inheres in one's structural position and it enables a kind of access to individuals, information, cooperation and financial resources (budgets) as well. So, it has been underlined that those in power stay in power by reinforcing the existing structure of the organization. Shafritz et al. (2014) emphasized in their study that when managers

think they are in powerful situations then they assume that it will be easier for them to accomplish more because they are sure that where the tools and they tend to be highly motivated and so they can easily motivate their subordinates. Plus, their actions and activities in the organization will be more likely to be on target and so they can easily and flexibly evaluate or shape policy to meet the certain fields, instantaneous environmental shifts or emergent situations. Therefore they will certainly gain the respect and the cooperation which attributed power brings and it's so clear that subordinates' skills and talents are authentic resources rather than threats or negative effects. Besides powerless live in a different world and usually have a negative point of view because lacking the supplies and resources, information or cooperation they might turn instead to the last weapon of those who don't have productive power or oppressive power and then hold other people back and punishing with any threat they can create. In sum, Table 1 shows some of the main ways in which variables in the organizations and in job design contribute to either power or powerlessness in organizations:

Table 1. Ways that Organizational Factors Contribute to Power or Powerlessness
(Shafritz et al.,2014:276).

Factors	Generates Power When Factor is ..	Generates Powerlessness When Factor is ..
Rules inherent in the job	few	many
Predecessors in the job	few	many
Established routines	few	many
Task variety	high	low
Rewards for reliability/ predictability	few	many
Rewards for unusual performance/innovation	many	few
Flexibility around use of people	high	low
Approvals needed for nonroutine decisions	few	many
Physical location	central	distant
Publicity about job activities	high	low
Relation of tasks to current problem areas	central	peripheral
Focus of tasks	outside work unit	inside work unit
Interpersonal contact in the job	high	low
Contact with senior officials	high	low
Participation in programs, conferences, meetings	high	low
Participation in problem- solving task forces	high	low
Advancement prospects of subordinates	high	low

2. THE POLITICS IN ORGANIZATIONS

From the traditional point of view, organizations are regarded as rational systems so it can be inferred that they are social machines that have been designed and operated just like instruments for reaching the predetermined organizational goals. So to speak organizational participants are the operators the machines, expected to carry out their jobs and duties efficiently as they are prescribed by formal rules, procedures, principles, job descriptions and contracts. Organizations are social systems but they differ from families and communities because they produce certain products or special services for the surrounding environment. On the other hand, since organizations are social systems and created and run by individuals, organizations might turn into arenas for political struggles easily because individuals work alone or as groups to obtain the best benefit that can be gained from the organization in which they are involved especially when the resources are scarce. Moreover, in this arena, any individual have some goals of his/her own that differ or contradict those of other individuals within the organization. Therefore, it's so clear that there is an ongoing over the organizational spoils between its competing individuals. In sum, politics are complex case for the organization because in one hand organization has official rules and demands for obtaining the organizational goals and on the other hand from the unofficial side that is utilitarian attitudes and behaviors of the individuals that exploit every chance to get the best for oneself (Samuel, 2018:1-3). Political behaviors in organizations imply the intentional actions that includes influence tactics, self-presentation,

impression management, voice and helping behavior to control or manage (create, maintain, modify or abandon) the shared instruments of organizational events in order to reach ambitioned goals which may, on the other hand, be unfeasible. In sum, political behaviors are both self-serving and benevolent motives in employees'/managers' efforts to attain personal and/or organizational goals and such purposive behaviors, which may range from active to passive engagement, form a concept within which employees and managers act to reach their goals. It has been commonly concluded recently by the business management scholars that politics are ubiquitous and they can be destructive to most employees, work teams, and organizations and through their assumption it can be evaluated that politics as a zero-sum game where the personal interests are ran after at the expense other individuals, resulting in backstage trade-offs, allusions, backstabbing and undermining the coworkers in the organization. On the other hand, ignoring the side effects of the politics in the organization, it has also been mentioned in the management literature that there are also positive effects about politics such as higher productivity, career advancement, higher innovation, and decision making consensus in the organizations (Kapoutsis and Thanos, 2016:310). Organizational politics have been defined as informal, unofficial, and sometimes behind-the-scenes efforts to sell ideas, influence an organization, increase power, or achieve other targeted objectives. Since organizations often have limited resources that must be allocated in some way, employees and groups in the organizations usually would not be agree with how the organizational resources

should be distributed or shared, so they sometimes try to get these resources for themselves or for their interest groups, which eventually increases the political games in organizations. Therefore, employees usually fraternize themselves with other individuals who have more common likes and taste in an effort to gain the scarce resources and often exhibit behaviors such as bargaining, negotiating, alliance building, and resolving conflicting interests. It has also been underlined that organizational politics are a dispensable fact of organizational life as organizations are came together with various aims and interests which must to be adjusted and about 93% of managers surveyed stated that organizational politics exist in their organization, and 70% thought that to be successful, aa individual has to engage in politics (Bauer and Erdogan, 2012:648). Figure 3 monitors the main potential individual and organizational antecedents of political behavior:

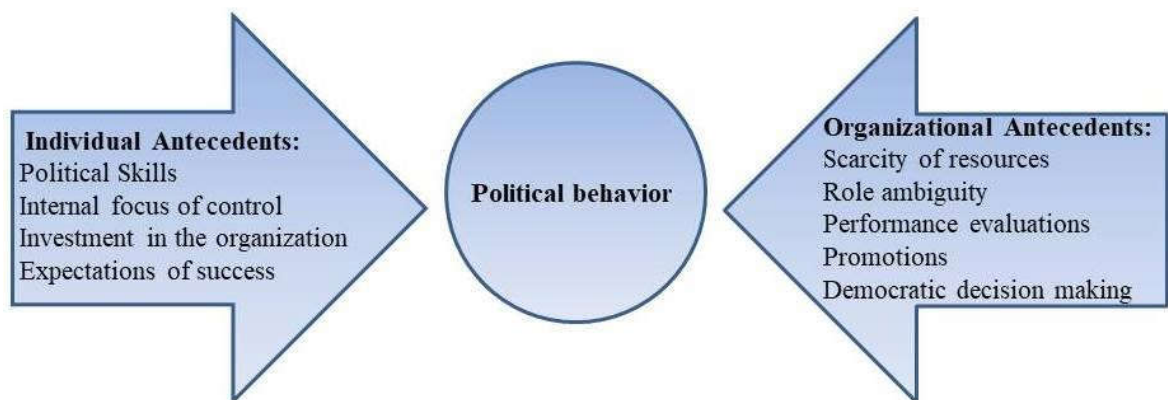


Figure 3: Main individual and organizational antecedents that lead to political behavior (Bauer and Erdogan, 2012: 650).

Furthermore, Landells and Albrecht (2019) outlined in their study that the organizational politics have usually been identified such a behavior that is “self-serving, inconsistent with the organizational objectives, and deliberate to give individuals, groups or entities harm and often viewed the negative outcomes of them as the impairing, destructive, and negative effects of organizational politics effects such as stress, burnout, turnover intentions, lower levels of job satisfaction, and organizational commitment and on the other hand fewer researches found out that there are some advantages like the impact of organizational politics on employee engagement, a construct highly regarded as essential to organizational achievement and competitive advantage. Besides, Mintzberg (1985) argued that political activities in organizations are often evaluated within the concept of “games” and political games are described as not only intricate and subtle simultaneous, over-lapping but also they are guided by rules while some of them are explicit, clear and stable but some of them are implicit, fuzzy or ever changing. Table 2 displays some of the features of the political games that are commonly played in organizations:

Table 2. Some Features of the Political Games in Organizations (Mintzberg, 1985:135).

GAME	MAIN PLAYERS	REASONS PLAYED	RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER SYSTEMS OF INFLUENCE
Insurgency	Unskilled operators (in large groups), lower level managers and sometimes professionals (singly or in small groups).	To resist authority (or other legitimate power)	Antagonistic to legitimate systems
Counter insurgency	Senior managers	To counter resistance to authority	Coexistent with legitimate systems
Sponsorship	Any subordinate or junior usually managers, personal staff or younger professionals	To build power base especially with superiors or seniors	Coexistent with authority or expertise
Alliance building	Line managers	To build power base with peers	Substitutable for legitimate systems or else coexistent with authority or expertise
Empire building	Line managers	To build power base with subordinates	Coexistent with authority or expertise sometimes substitutable for legitimate systems
Budgeting	Line managers	To build power base with resources	Coexistent with authority expertise
Expertise	Operators and staff specialists	To build power base with real of feigned knowledge and skills	Coexistent with expertise or substitutable for it
Lording	Unskilled operators and their managers (sometimes professionals)	To build power base often with authority, especially bureaucratic rules	Coexistent with authority or expertise or ideology

Guo et al. (2019) emphasized in their study that the organizational politics associate with the non-sanctioned behaviors and activities strategically planned to preserve and enhance self-interests commonly in conflict with organizational objectives and organizational politics have been outlined as a disruptive organizational characteristic that, when perceived by employees, is probably to have a destructive effect on employees' behaviors so it has been mentioned that most people perceive organizational politics as self-serving and manipulative and it will eventually jeopardize the well-being of both employees and organizations on the whole. Besides, it has been underlined that workplaces with higher levels of politics are usually expressed as

distrust, injustice, unfair decision making processes and disparity in organization. Moreover, it has been maintained that when organizational politics are perceived to be at higher levels, some employees will probably engage in political behaviors such as self-promotion and ingratiation, to protect self-interests rather than the best interest of the organization. For example, employees are often likely to engage in influencing behaviors such as self-promotion and ingratiation to get higher performance ratings from their supervisors. In sum, it has been mentioned that when the level of organizational politics is perceived to be low, highly engaged employees are more likely to be recognized by their supervisors, because supervisor evaluation is less likely biased toward employees heavily engaged in organizational politics. On the other hand, some employees will intensively show political behaviors to affect supervisor evaluations when organizational politics are perceived to be high by them. However, these employees who are opposed to organizational politics and more engaged in their duties will probably receive less favorable performance evaluation from their managers. Moreover, Kacmar and Baron (1999) stated in their study that a behavior can only be considered as political if others are made use of as resources in competitive situation, that is to say the essence of the political behavior is inherently self-centered, for example using others and political behavior in organizations are enacted to reach goals that are not sanctioned by the organization or to reach organizationally sanctioned outcomes via non-sanctioned means. Additionally, Ferris et al. (2019) stated in their study that political characteristics influence

individuals' political actions and interpretation of political effects in organizations and it has been maintained that political actions work to manage shared meaning in a manner which affects political outcomes. It has also been concluded that political outcomes also influence the ways in which individuals behave politically and politics generates effectiveness feedback, which affects decisions and whether and how to engage in subsequent self-interested behavior. Figure 4 displays the visual reorganization of organizational politics and the causes and outcomes of them:

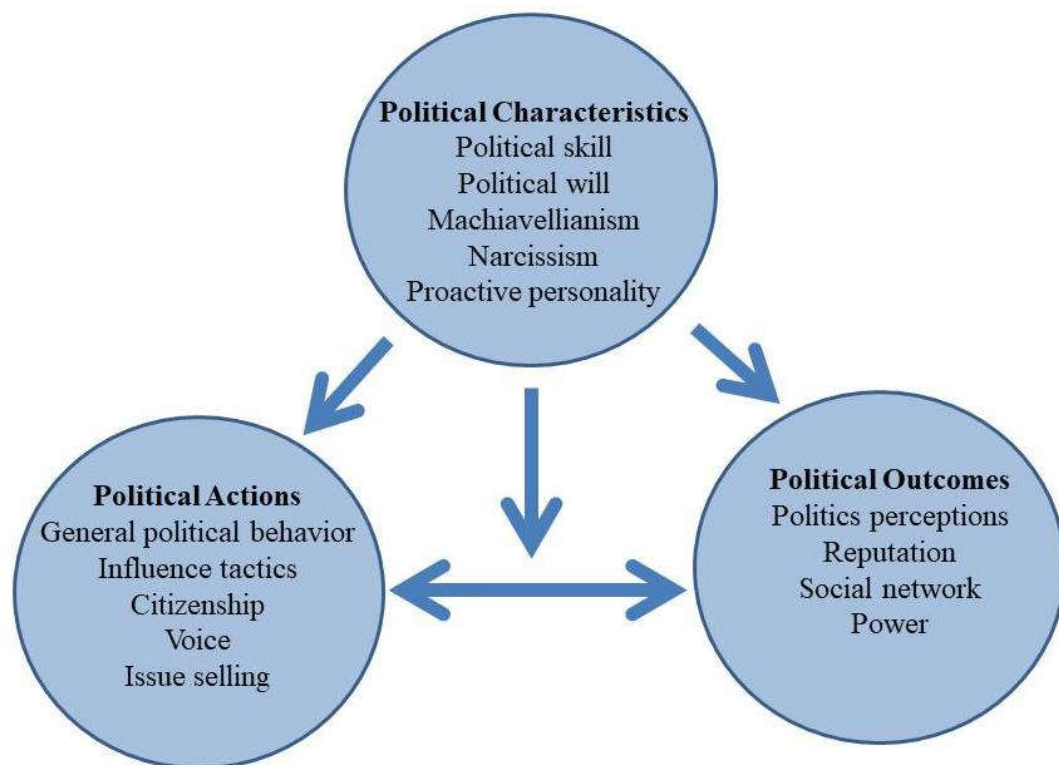


Figure 4. Organizational Politics and Their Causes and Outcomes, (Ferris et al. 2019:302).

Vigoda (2000) argued that organizational politics are often viewed as self-serving behaviors by individuals to obtain self-interests,

advantages, and personal benefits at the expense of others and very often contradictory to the interests of the entire organization or work team. These behaviors have also been related with manipulation, defamation, disruptiveness, and illegitimate ways of overusing power to attain one's objectives. It has also been suggested that politics in organizations should be understood within the concept of what individuals think of it rather than what it actually represents because the higher the perceptions of politics are in the eyes of an organization member, the lower in that person's eyes is the level of justice, equity, and fairness and when employees perceive more politics in the organization, they are also likely to see the organization as less supportive of innovation. Salem (2014) suggested that organizational politics are a subjective perception and perceptions of politics may become more determinant to some extent that when employees think that their working environment as highly political, promoting self-interests of others and thereby unfair and unjust from an individual point of view so employees wouldn't be satisfied particularly when they think that the organizational decisions making regarding rewards and promotion to be unfair especially when the resources are scarce and they may lead to increased negative feeling towards others, loss of position credibility and strategic power, lower levels of job performance, higher levels of dissatisfaction and work stress, lower job performance and finally less organizational commitment. Labrague et al. (2017) maintained in their study that organizational politics consist of a sequence of intentional actions which are carried out by an individual in order to pursue only his/her own self-interests

by overlooking other people's rights and welfare or their organizations and these deliberate acts are usually hidden or can be beyond the organizational rules and regulations, on the other hand, they directly or indirectly influence the organization's functions and processes as well and it's certain that organizational politics can be observed in all organizations in varying degrees since they are used to achieve personal goals and interests, protect or enhance one's own professional career and gain resources or advantages from the organization. It has also emphasized that organizational politics are often associated with negative effects on employees such as decrease in work performance level, decreased job satisfaction, decreased organizational commitment, lowered attendance, low morale, negative attitudes and negligent behaviors such as the intention to leave and disregard of duty and organizational politics perceptions of the employees are directly related to negative emotional states such as job stress and job burnout.

In addition, according to Nawaz et al. (2019) organizational politics may result in a rather rational basis for competitive advantage, especially when individuals in organizations are appropriately politically skilled and a foresighted management may successfully direct those highly political organizational environments that are under stress and a political skill that includes an aptitude to employ actions that support feelings of trust, confidence and sincerity among employees may reduce conflicts. Moreover, it has been concluded that managers can also maintain their political behaviors to enhance justice

and equality in organizations when they perceive highly political environment at a workplace.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, power and politics have been outlined, the definitions of them have been given in detail and a condensed conceptual framework of the power and politics in organizations have been discussed. Broadly speaking, the human factor and its outcomes on the behavior of organizations in general and the individuals in particular are obvious and organizations are created and run by human beings should be always remembered. So, organizations can easily be turned into arenas for political games or power struggles since every individual may have ambitions and their own plans in order to reach their goals or gain more personal benefits in organizations. Therefore, it can be inferred that organizations also are political structures that provide opportunities for employees to develop careers and also enable platforms for the pursuit of personal interests and motives.

Additionally, accumulation of power is the instrument for transforming individual interests into activities which influence other people and a key to the development of careers for the employees as well. Power struggles come into being especially when the resources are scarce and to control the knowledge and information and decision making processes in the organizations. Hence, there is a distinct expression that politics exist in every organization so employees often engage in self-serving behaviors, organizational politics, in order to increase the probability of obtaining positive outcomes in

organizations and personal interests without regarding to their effect on the organization itself. To sum up, it must be remembered that when both individuals and groups engage in organizational politics that may be rather destructive, as individuals focus on personal interests and goals at the expense of the organization, such self-serving political efforts might negatively influence the social groupings, cooperation, information sharing, and many other organizational functions on the whole and they may lead to huge hidden costs for the organizations such as higher levels of employee turnover and employee burn out and lower levels of work engagement and work satisfaction in organizations.

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