

Power and Politics in Organizations



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Bev Scott
Bev Scott Consulting
Phone: 415-863-2994
Email: bev@bevscott.com
Website: www.bevscott.com

Purpose

- *Examine the reality and source of politics in the organization*
- *Identify the options for positive politics*
- *Explore the concept of power: image, authenticity, sources and expression*
- *What does this mean for us as Internal or External OD consultants*

Introduction

Choosing positive political acts and the authentic exercise of power is congruent with the role and values of the OD practitioner

Politics *

- *Walking a tightrope between advocating our own position and not increasing resistance against us by our actions*
- *Organizations have limited resources*
 - *Individuals/units want their fair share*
 - *Methods used at the heart of politics*

* Drawn from Peter Block, Empowered Manager, *Positive Political Skills at Work*, 1987.

Playing the Game*

To manage politics, many of us believe we must be good at:

- *Manipulating situations and at times people*
- *Managing information and plans advantageously*
- *Invoking names of important people*
- *Becoming calculating managing relationships*
- *Paying great attention to what people above us want.*
- *Believing that to achieve our goals we must be cautious in telling the truth*

** Drawn from Peter Block, Empowered Manager, Positive Political Skills at Work, 1987.*

*Negative Politics Is Rooted In:**

- *Patriarchal Contract*
- *Myopic Self Interest*
- *Myth that self-esteem is based on advancement and moving up*
- *Manipulation*
- *Dependency*
- *Powerlessness*

** Drawn from Peter Block, Empowered Manager, Positive Political Skills at Work, 1987.*

Impact of Politics on Consultants

- *“I need to know...”*
- *Saying “No” is hazardous to your health
(and your job)*
- *Becoming Dependent*
- *Father (the client) knows best*
- *The “Emperor has no clothes”*
- *Vulnerable to Temptations*

Options of Positive Politics*

Acting as a living example of how we want the whole organization to operate

- ***Entrepreneurial Contract***
- ***Enlightened Self Interest***
- ***Autonomy***
- ***Shared Power***

* Drawn from Peter Block, *Empowered Manager*, *Positive Political Skills at Work*, 1987.

*“Power is like fire. It can do useful things; it can be fun to play with and to watch, but it must be constantly guarded and trimmed back lest it burn and destroy. The proper attitude toward power is respect tinged with some suspicion.”**

* Winter, David G. (1973). *The Power Motive*. New York, NY, US: Free Press.

Historically Negative Images of Power

■ *Absolute control*

■ *Domination*

■ *Exploitation*

■ *Coercion*

■ *Manipulation*

■ *Directive*

Changing Image of Power

- *Socialized Power*
- *Empowerment*
- *Effectiveness*
- *Post Heroic Leadership*
- *Partnership*

Resources to Exercise Power

- *Confusion of Power and Resources*
 - *Capacity or Ability to Influence or Control*
- *Other Resources Include:*
 - *Competence and Skills*
 - *Knowledge or Information*
 - *Alliances and Networks*
 - *Position or Authority*
 - *Financial and Physical*

Definition of Power

Intentional activity of making and keeping decisions over time.

Authenticity

- *Greek source: “one that accomplishes”*
- *Current meaning: trustworthy, credible, convincingly real, genuine*
- *Behavior which is consistent with belief and characterized by credibility and respect for others and their rights*

Authenticity

Components

- *Self Awareness and Quest for Self Understanding*
- *Behavior Aligned with One's Values, Needs and Preferences*
- *Balanced Processing of Information*
- *Transparency Personally and Organizationally*
- *Focus on Relationship Building*

Expressions of Power

■ *Initiative*

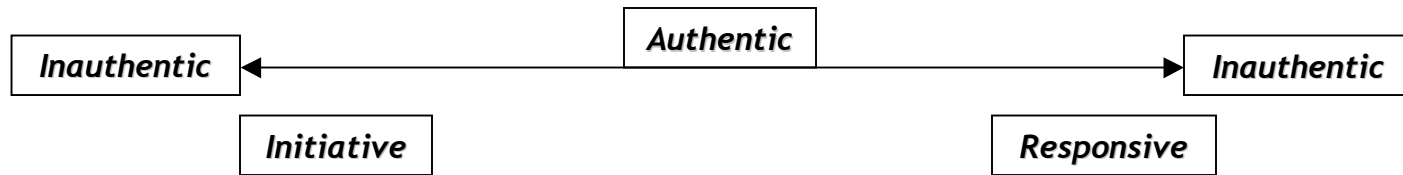
- *Overcoming resistance*

- *Taking initiative to meet one's goals and needs*

■ *Responsive*

- *Responding or refusing to respond to meet needs and goals of others*

Activities of Power



<p><u>Using Spin</u> Supplementing truth with self-serving distortions.</p>	<p><u>Influencing</u> Using reason, arguments, true data and the relationship to others to direct the course of action.</p>	<p><u>Offering</u> Creating and exploring options providing resources for others to implement their ideas.</p>	<p><u>Manipulation</u> Rigging options by playing to the needs of others dishonestly.</p>
<p><u>Exploitation</u> Deceiving others and taking more than one gives.</p>	<p><u>Negotiating</u> Seeking a deal between relative equals which levels the playing field for each person's perceived benefit.</p>	<p><u>Negotiating</u> Supporting and being responsive to a proposal between relative equals to each person's perceived benefit.</p>	<p><u>Using Others</u> Taking advantage of the others in a pseudo deal, which may look real but is not.</p>
<p><u>Tyranny</u> Demanding which is arbitrary, capricious, unfair, or without legitimate authority.</p>	<p><u>Insistence/ Requiring</u> Utilizing recognized and legitimate authority to persuade others to act in accordance with your position.</p>	<p><u>Resistance</u> Refusing to participate or giving advice against a course of action that would violate authenticity.</p>	<p><u>Revenge/Betrayal</u> Transforming refusal into sabotage or deviously or unfairly punishing others.</p>

Examples of the Activities of Initiative Power

For each category of power expression, the activities can be distorted and become inauthentic.

Below the activities of *INITIATIVE* power are defined with examples. In addition, the distortion of each of these activities to inauthentic behavior is described and defined.

INFLUENCING: Using reason, arguments, true data and the relationship with others to direct the course of action.

Example: Utilizing factual information and analysis to obtain client's agreement to proceed on a new project or initiative.

When influence is distorted and inauthentic, the expression moves toward "spin"...

USING SPIN: Supplementing truth with self-serving distortions.

Example: Using incomplete information or data slanted to give a biased or self-serving picture to support your proposed recommendation.

Examples of the Activities of Initiative Power

NEGOTIATING: Seeking a deal between relative equals which levels the playing field for each person's perceived benefit.

Example: Proposing processes to involve all relevant stakeholders in the decision process.

When negotiating is distorted and inauthentic, action becomes "exploitive"...

EXPLOITATION: Deceiving others and taking more than one gives.

Example: Gaining a client's agreement for an intervention by promising positive outcomes when your data suggests otherwise.

Examples of the Activities of Initiative Power

INSISTENCE/ REQUIRING:

Utilizing recognized and legitimate authority to persuade others to act in accordance with your position.

Example:

Insisting that a client address a sensitive moral or legal issue as a basis for continuing your consulting contract.

When requiring or demanding is exercised with inauthentic or illegitimate means, it becomes “tyranny”...

TYRANNY:

Demanding which is arbitrary, capricious, unfair or without legitimate authority.

Example:

Threatening a client with exposing sensitive or personal confidential information unless the client acts on your demands.

Examples of the Activities of Responsive Power

Below the authentic and inauthentic activities of *RESPONSIVE* power are defined with examples:

OFFERING: Creating and exploring options and providing resources for others to implement their ideas.

Example: Offering processes and interventions which allow employees to express and implement their concerns and ideas.

When offering is distorted and inauthentic, it becomes “manipulative”...

MANIPULATION: Rigging options by playing to the needs of others dishonestly.

Example: Offering processes and interventions which you know will undermine the credibility of certain individuals / managers.

Examples of the Activities of Responsive Power

NEGOTIATING: Supporting and being responsive to a proposal between relative equals to each person's perceived benefit.

Example: Responding to co-facilitator's proposal in how you will both manage the responsibility of the intervention.

When Negotiating is distorted and inauthentic, it becomes "using"...

USING: Taking advantage of others in a pseudo deal which may look real but is not.

Example: Taking advantage of someone's mistaken credit for a successful intervention result that was not your own.

Examples of the Activities of Responsive Power

RESISTANCE: Refusing to participate or giving advice against a course of action that would violate authenticity.

Example: Refusing to share confidential information about an employee when pressured by a senior manager.

When resistance becomes distorted or inauthentic, it becomes “revenge”...

**REVENGE OR
BETRAYAL:** Transforming refusal into sabotage or deviously and unfairly punishing others.

Example: Refusing to share your information which contradicts a negative assessment of a difficult client whom you don't like.

Summary of Definitions

- *Politics: Balancing our choices for our own self-interest with the needs/wants of other influenced by the norms/values of the organization*
- *Positive Politics: Taking actions as an example of how we want the whole organization to operate*
- *Power: The Intentional activity of making and actualizing decisions*
- *Authenticity: Behavior which is consistent with beliefs and characterized by credibility and respect for others and their rights*
- *Expressions of Power:*
 - *Initiative: Overcoming resistance or taking the initiative to meet one's own needs/goals.*
 - *Responsive: Responding or refusing to respond to the needs/goals of others*

What Does This Mean For Us Personally

- *Authenticity*
- *Missing Presence*
- *Personal Mastery*
- *Taking care of self*
- *Expert and Process Consulting*
- *Entrepreneurial Spirit*

What Does This Mean For Us Personally

- *Entry Charter*
- *Becoming a partner with our clients*
- *Consultant versus subordinate role*
- *Right to say no*
- *Being Responsive*
- *Initiating*

In Closing

Choosing positive political acts and the authentic exercise of power is congruent with the role and values of the OD practitioner

- *Participation and choice in decision making*
- *Self awareness and personal growth*
- *Being responsible and accountable*
- *Transparency*
- *Finding meaning and purpose in your work*
- *Continuous Learning*

“My belief is that it is impossible to develop strength and dignity in others without finding it first in ourselves and that the first step in the development of real power is to be able to admit weakness”

**-Irwin Federman
CEO, Monolithis Memories**