



ORGANISATIONAL POLITICS — A HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT FOCUS

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Abstract

Organizational politics is largely portrayed negatively. In the pursuit of one's career in organizations one cannot avoid playing by the rules of this game. Its presence in every facet of corporate life demands that we give keen attention to the concept of organizational politics. This paper looks at organizational politics from ethical and unethical perspectives; what is the impact of organizational politics on human relations and performance? How does it generally manifest itself in Ghanaian organizations, both public and private? Human resource management activities like recruitment and selection, training and development as well as career progression are a few of an organization's life that politics as an organizational phenomenon affects. Leadership's role in energizing organizational politics in a positive direction is crucial for harmonizing individual and organizational goals.

Key words: Organizational politics, political savvy, Nepotism, connection, paternalism

Introduction

In the pursuit of one's career it is impossible to ignore the role of organizational politics. The tremendous impact that the

phenomenon called politics exerts on whether one progresses or not in the career path is unimaginable. At the initial stages of one's work life, where the beginnings of a career can be traced, it is very difficult to distinguish between playing the political game and obeying one's superiors. Mid career fully exposes one to the game. Caution is the word, and tread carefully is the process. Does organizational politics exist? If it does, is it obvious? Is it right? Do you need discernment, maturity or just some knowledge in Human Relations in Organizations to play by it? It will be worth the while not to get too academic but get to evaluate best practices that form the backdrop and an enabler to Organizational performance. Believe it or not corporate politicians aim to influence outcomes. This article seeks to give an overview of organizational politics, the extent to which it affects our work lives, and what it takes to play the political game. It will explore a common feature of today's organization, the implementation of strategic change, within the context of politics. What steps should be taken to tackle the dilemma that organizational politics brings up? Two major human resource activities, recruitment and selection, training and development are conducted within the strong back drop of organizational politics. The paper's focus is on the form of politics that occurs during the conduct of these activities.

Politics from Latin "posee" means 'to do', 'to be able to influence'; to have power is to possess the capacity to control (Hartman, 2002). Politics is defined as the process of gaining and using power. Politics is a fact of life and in organizational circles politics can be mind-boggling and energy sapping (Hartman, 2002). Interestingly, politics is not what one does; it is why one thinks one is doing what one does; and it is said to be critical to career success. In such instances it is described as the network of interactions by which power is acquired, transferred and used. There is no gainsaying that, like money in the economy; politics is a medium of exchange in organizations.

A great deal of studies position organizational politics in the negative light. Cox (2006) opines that it is a major downward influence on staff morale, productivity as well as profitability. Unethical or negative political behavior exists and is sometimes encouraged in organizations. The exhibition of this form of political behavior reveals internal competition for resources and recognition. On the other hand, positive politics, a process of influencing people with a motive of moving the organization forward while recognizing personal interest is constructive; it gets things done and makes the individual and the organization both winners.

Unethical politics leans towards lies, cheating and sometimes breaking the rule to gain and use power. A negative connotation of the term politics is exhibited by people who abuse power. Lussier, (2005) makes an observation on the linkage between politics and principle by quoting Mahatma Gandhi, "Politics without principle is sin". The ramifications of such political behavior can be devastating for the victim. Moral uprightness is essential, for education and qualification alone are not enough to realize one's potential. The result of unethical politics is ineffective human relations; for instance in the work

setting achievement of departmental objective is hindered by unhealthy inter departmental politics. Examples of such unethical politics, include but are not exclusive, of the following: peddling untruth about someone, presenting falsehood on curriculum vitae, acquiring a vacant office by scheming to deprive a colleague who badly needs it, and a two-face (hypocritical) person.

On the other hand ethical politics takes the form of persuasion by presenting the truth or facts logically and influencing tactics eg. Ingratiation (the act of giving praise and being friendly to get the person into a good mood prior to making a request). The source of the influence is twofold:

One could use one's personal appeal to make a request from another to enable one meet one's objective based on friendship and loyalty.

One can also wield legitimate influence through inspiring others.

The merits of ethical politics include reciprocal results for both parties in getting their desires met. This mutually desirable benefit leads to the possession of group power and ultimately organizational benefits (good business and good benefits are synonymous).

Unethical politics has inherent demerits. The individual benefits at the expense of the organization, a win-lose situation. On the other hand, the practice of unethical politics by management hurts the individual employees and gives short term benefits to the organization. It leads to retaliation, loss of trust and declining productivity. Unethical politics exudes deviant behavior and is closely linked to stress.

From the foregoing, politics whether ethical or unethical has enormous implications for

organizations. For business to thrive, the political undertones within which strategic plans are drawn must be given a closer look. As corporate entities, organizations are highly political. It is imperative that these business entities take due cognizance of the place of organizational politics especially, in the event of change which affects the organization as an entity and the individual. It has been widely acknowledged that 'political savvy provides a fruitful strategy for survival in a macro cosmic world of never ending change and chaos'.

How do individuals view the political activity around them? To analyze politics from a perception diagnostics would show a 'political animal' in every individual. The individual perceptual differences and varying perspectives about positive and negative politics determines the outcome of the political activity. Those who do self-interest oriented politics and the victims of the politicking interpret the phenomenon differently. Hartman(2002) quotes Norton Juster : " From here that looks like a bucket of water , but from an ant's point of view, it's a vast ocean; from an elephant's point of view it's just a cool drink; and to a fish, of course it's home." Handling organizational politics from whatever perspective requires skills.

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and with all your getting get understanding" (Bible: King James Version. Proverbs 4:7). That's a verse from the good old book; but for our purposes, in all your "getting get political skills," to avoid being hurt by organizational politics. In corporate governance, politics in the board room, (the highest governance structure) could be delicate. Why? Motives for offering Board service could range from friendships, potential economic gain, networking, learning and exposure etc. Any of the motives listed must be compatible with the corporate objective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Theoretical Context of Organizational Politics

Majority of the theories on organizational politics centre on its impact on the organization and the individual employee. In assessing this impact the focus has been how ethical the practice of organizational politics is. Cavanagh, Moberg & Velasquez (1981) developed ethical models on the "explicit consideration of ethical restraints" to analyze the political uses of power. Their assertion is that there is the political and non political use of power in organizations. Normative ethics is used as a framework to test the ethical use of power. Theories considered in this model include utilitarianism, theories of moral rights and justice.

Utilitarianism advocates the 'greatest happiness principle', when the interest of the larger group is served the action is right (Mill, 1806). Utility is the foundation of morals. Happiness is pleasure and the absence of pain. Pleasure and the freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends. By deduction therefore utility or happiness is the criterion of right and wrong. If the political action brings happiness to majority then it is ethical.

The theory of justice on the other hand supposes a rule of conduct and a sentiment which sanctions the rule. The rule of conduct is common to all mankind and it is for the common good. Sentiment on the other hand is the desire that punishment may be suffered by those who infringe the rule and violate another's right. A right leads to a valid claim on society to protect the violated person, for the purpose of the general good. Rawls (1958) places emphasis on the equitable distribution of goods and services as justice. He argues that if there is unequal distribution of benefits then it should be so because it would benefit all.

There is arguably a meeting point between justice and social utility. The moral rights principle puts emphasis on the universality of a law. Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature (Kant 1724-1804).

The Political Use of Power Analysis

The political use of power in organizations is described as the ability to mobilize resources, energy and information on behalf of a preferred goal or strategy. Where there are no conflicts over means or ends, power does not exist (Tushman, 1977). This view was reiterated by Drake (1979) and Pfeiffer (1977) it is only when how to get things done and what is done brings about diverse interest that, the use of power comes to play. Management theory focuses on the value of outcomes rather than on the value of the means by which the outcome is reached. Thus people do not estimate the consequences of the manner in which objectives are realized.

The two fundamental propositions on power bases have been identified as the components of organizations i.e. individuals and coalitions; and protection of interest (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Scheneck & Pennings 1971; Thompson 1967, Allen et al 1979). 'Politics is how interest and influence play out in an institution' (Benjamin Franklin). Protection of interests by individuals and coalitions can be viewed as political when unsanctioned means (outside formal organizational policies and procedures) are used to achieve unsanctioned ends (Mayes and Allen, 1977).

Empirical Literature

Decades of research across many industries and countries have shown that to excel in an organization does not mean the possession of special skills, neither does creating a win-win situation for corporation and employees but Political Savvy is the requirement. The operational definition of political savvy is, ethically building a critical mass of support for an idea you care about (DeLuca, 1999). The individual frequently touted comments boarder on the perception of the inseparable nature of organizational politics and negative ethics: "how anyone can increase their success with the right techniques and attitude without sacrificing values/ethics". "You don't have to sell your soul to get ahead".

For a leader, however, to act ethically is a way to increase influence, and turn competitive turf wars into collaborative team work.

The focus of investigations into organizational politics carried out over the period 1974 to 2006 was on the nature, structure, dynamics and personal success attributes related to dealing with politics. The findings categorized members of organizations into three structural groupings, with distinct mindset, behavior and success factors of each group. This framework attests to the need for a more functional view of organizational politics.

Structural Grouping	Mindset	Behavior	Success Factor (Performance & Promotion)
Avoidance	Assumes a rational systems mindset	Low networking Risk avoidance	Low innovation success rate Low leadership success
Positive	Human Systems mindset: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Win-win • Ethical • Organizational focus • Enlightened self interest • Best interest of business • Collaborative 	High networking Constant small risking	Higher innovation success rate High leadership success
Negative	Human systems mindset: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Win-lose • Non ethical • Upward focus • Self interest & personal gain • Competitive 	Low networking Risk avoidance	Low innovation success rate in performance and promotion. Low leadership success

Other factors considered in the study were personality, interpersonal skills and intelligence. The negative structural grouping uses manipulative skill. The negative group's activities thrive on systemic sources that result in functional sub optimization and high internal competition due to inadequacy of resources. The study also identified that like any other politics, people who can be trusted (positive politics group), do better in organizational politics in the long run. Integrity and strong relations feature prominently in the positive politics structured grouping. This semi neutral group will lean more towards positive politics.

The implication of this review is that organizational politics is evidently a phenomenon no one can ignore in organizations. It is a necessary fact in business. Although it is officially considered dysfunctional in many

organizations it is expedient for organizations to acknowledge the dynamics between organizational politics and organizational success in terms of growth, realization of objectives and productivity. There is certainly a qualitative return on investment on organizational politics in the context of ethical conduct.

The point being made is that as social structures, organizations cannot do without people, and humans are political in nature. The level of politicking depends on how much is at stake. One must understand this to be able to thrive and achieve both organizational and individual goals. It is best to take a stance based on one's convictions **when caught in the throes of political dilemma**. Aside this one definitely needs political skills.

We have to influence people in some way. How we do it is determined by the underlying intent and motives of our action. The pressure of ethical and unethical politics vis-a-vis one's 'coping' ability determines to a large extent whether one chooses to walk in the corridors of power or not. Politics at the strategic level in corporate entities is very diplomatic. It involves managing a hybrid of interests that demand acting diplomatically to the extent of compromising one's principles every now and then. Leadership success and effectiveness can be greatly undermined or enhanced thereby. In the context of making business decisions there are both subtle internal and external political demands that cannot be evaluated financially, neither do they make business sense. However, where the forces of unethical politics are greater than the ethical forces leadership must choose where to pitch camp. What steps should be taken to tackle the dilemma that organizational politics brings up?

Given that the lack of the positive role of political fluency has not been rooted firmly in our culture, it would not be far from wrong to say that the missing discipline in management is organizational politics; it would not be out of place to propose the need to actively create political awareness. Organizational politics should be taught as a mainstream management discipline. The Ferris et al (2000) and Hartley (2006) competency framework and curriculum content suggests that to gain political skill an individual must have:

Social Astuteness: The skill needed to effectively interact with other humans at a social level. This includes being able to read people well and take notice of how people are affected by one's behavior.

Organizational Astuteness: The ability to read the organization. How it operates and in what context it exists. Who the key players are, how they are connected, and in a sense, how to predict group reactions. Coupled with this is

the skill of being able to build effective group influencing strategies.

Interpersonal influence: The set of skills that enable one to effectively persuade, reason, negotiate at both individual and group levels. To be able to counter other moves, build power, network and build coalitions and consensus.

Engendering Trust: It has been identified that engendering trust is the foundation for authentic and sustainable political skill. To be able to display high levels of integrity, to empathize, self disclose and build enduring relationships with human beings.

It will be worth the while to give a thought as to how much knowledge people have about politics.

The Director Magazine (Holbeche & McCartney, 2002) report that research carried out at Roffey Park Institute in Britain concluded that 45% of respondents assign the source of their power to politics, 49% of the study population asserts that organizational politics is on the increase while 70% have been hurt as a result of such political activities. Its impact on profits has been assessed as negative and causes exit from organizations at both the employee and investor level (Cox, 2006). The immense role politics play requires that organizational changes give due consideration to this factor.

Strategic Change and Politics

Strategic changes affect the basis of the organization existence, its structures, objects, core values and employees among others. The wave of strategic change sweeping across the corporate world is largely focused on people. Change in attitude towards work, work ethics that enhances productivity is therefore paramount. Change management has become one of the organizational practices that has attracted a lot of attention lately. It is worth

noting that managing is not only an analytical and planning activity but a political process. It is essential that an understanding of the political systems within an organization precedes evaluation of the change implementation plan. Strategic change, in particular, occurs within a political context. This is exhibited in the following ways:

Manipulation of people through the distribution of organizational resources aims at building power bases, overcoming resistance and ultimately achieving compliance.

The relationship of management with powerful groupings in organizations can have a positive or negative impact on the execution of the corporate plan. The group is seen to be sponsoring or resisting a certain course of action; thereby creating subsystems. Through social alliances and a network of contacts a political process is set in motion.

Organizational subsystems and symbolic mechanisms are issues in change management. The symbols are political tools that preserve and reinforce or questions the status quo. It can be deduced therefore that the exhibition of power by individuals and sub groups advance the course of strategic change.

To put it succinctly Jackall (1988) argues that 'What is right in the corporation is not what is right in a man's home or his church. What is right in the corporation is what the guy above wants from you'. The author of this quote compares corporate entities to a fiefdom in the middle ages, the CEO (the Lord) offers protection, prestige and status to managers (vassals) and serfs (workers) in return for homage (commitment) and service (work). In such a system advancement and promotion result from loyalty, trust, politics and personality as much as, if not more from experience, education ability and actual accomplishments'. Central to a successful change implementation from the foregoing is the

management of political agendas. The common denominators that underline loyalty, trust, politics and personality are Human relations and performance.

Impact of Politics on Human Relations and Performance.

Politics is not the easiest subject to discuss but attention to managing politics is long overdue. The impact of Politics in Human Relations and Performance can definitely not be ignored. Human Relations (HR) is defined as interactions among people (Lussier, 2005). Truth is the basis of all human interaction. The goal of Human Relations is to create a win-win situation by satisfying employee needs while ensuring organizational performance. It has been observed that politics is important for performance.

Performance is the level at which an objective is achieved. Heads of Departments cannot achieve set goals all alone but through people. Ethical politics uses the concept of reciprocity positively. If my superior offers good leadership it behoves on me to perform my duty as expected. It involves creating obligations and debts, developing alliances and using them to accomplish objectives. In local parlance "one good turn deserves another". The demand for a good turn is moral. But note that behavior does not always beget like behavior on a one-to-one ratio. It just sets the tone, an ambiance of the stage within which options are offered. The network of alliances (political coalitions) is the tool one needs to meet set targets when required. Through this means all members of the organization have a win-win situation. The goal of human relations is met and ultimately organizational targets.

Unethical politics in the short run achieves the level of performance. In the long run however people lose their trust and performance suffers. The Roffey Park

Institute puts it this way, "company politics appear to be rife with too many people concerned more with politics than performance. Hidden agendas, internal rivalry, people maneuvering for power, blame culture and lack of trust in colleagues and in top level management adds to the burdens caused by change" (Holbeche, & McCartney 2002).

From the positive angle people can be made to see effective networking through political actions. It is only then that training, education and information as well as good interpersonal relations can facilitate the pursuit of individual and organizational goals in tandem. Organizational politics does not have to be about hidden agendas, internal rivalry, and blame culture. Lack of trust does not foster good human relations; it hinders effective teamwork and ultimately performance. Positive organizational performance is the fertile ground for competitive advantage. Human resource management can therefore set the ball rolling by shifting the focus from unethical politics to ethical politics through political awareness creation.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS?

Leadership in all forms must make use of power. The central issue in leadership is not whether power is used or not, but how wisely leadership uses it. Leadership even in the hands of the strong, confident, or charismatic is basically relational. Human relations are the reason why there is an attraction between a leader and a follower.

'Leadership is the ability to persuade others to seek defined objectives enthusiastically. It is the human factor which binds a group together and motivates it toward goals. Management activities such as planning, organizing and decision making are dormant cocoons until the leader triggers the power of motivation in people and guides them toward goals' (Donnelly, et al, 1992).

Holbeche & McCartney (2002) argue that people will deploy political skills and use their power and influence to enhance or protect their interests.

Interestingly those constructive protagonists who use politics to achieve a beneficial outcome for others as well as themselves are more likely to be seen to have strategic influence, or leadership skills. Professor Jean Hartley asserted:

'Political skills cannot be viewed as the domain of the specialist, but as a mainstream element of leadership across all sectors.....if you really want an organization to achieve success in today's complex environment, you cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the political dimension of your business or service'.

Leadership obligation in all facets of organizational politics cannot be overemphasized.

The practice of diplomacy in the corporate environment has been named as the face of organizational politics. Let no offence be taken, the head of an organization cannot help but accede to request from above. The use of power then is determined from 'on high'. In a study on Executive behavior this observation was made:

"Before we made the study, I always thought of a chief executive as the conductor of the orchestra standing aloof on his podium. Now I am in some respects inclined to see him as a puppet in a puppet show with hundreds of people pulling the strings and forcing him to act in one way or the other" [Carlson, 1991].

The Ghanaian Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has a responsibility to respond to numerous strings pulled from different quarters. Request for favors from high officials from powerful subgroups is one such string. Leadership should arm them-

selves with the knowledge of the benefits of ethical politics and the cost of unethical politics to have success.

The Human Resource Management Focus

Human Resource Management is defined as encompassing those activities designed to coordinate human resource of an organization (Byars/Rue, 1987)

The inevitability of politics in organizational circles is captured aptly in the following words:

"In the sense that ways must be found to create order and direct people, organizations are intrinsically political. They are about authority, power, superior-subordinate relationships and conflicting interests. Viewing organizations as political systems helps in an understanding of day-to-day organizational life, the wheeling and dealing, and pursuit of special interest".
[Mullins, 1993]

Organizational politics portrays itself in diverse forms; however in two functional human resource management activities i.e. recruitment and selection, and training and development, nepotism and paternalism are the obvious forms of organizational politics in both the public and private sector.

The move towards human resource strategies as a competitive advantage tool saw many organizations ranking recruitment and selection as major levers in strategic change. Recruitment seeks and attracts a pool of people from which qualified candidates for job vacancies can be chosen. The selection process on the other hand chooses the individual from the pool of qualified applicants, who can most successfully, perform the job. The objective of recruitment and selection is to acquire requisite skills and qualities in the human resource of the organization. Corporate strategy through good people management ensures that organizational outcomes are thus met.

The mode of making vacancies known in a public sector organization could be the beginning of nepotistic tendencies in the recruitment and selection process. A study conducted in Ghana outlined three main avenues for vacancy announcement. Kyei-Darko, (2009) states that out of the ninety (90) staff interviewed fifty eight (58) got to know of the position when it was advertised, employee referral accounted for thirty-two (32) applicants (friends 10, and family 22).

From this study employee referral gives a high possibility of nepotism. The family members and friends who served as leads would strongly advocate for the employment of their contacts. Ultimately there is the development of cliques in organizations.

Nepotism is the tendency of favoring relatives by selecting them as successful employment candidates. Hillstrom (2007) defines nepotism as a variety of practices related to favoritism...hiring one's own family members as well as advancing under qualified family members based simply on the familial relationship. The causes of nepotism are the need to fulfill familial obligations and take care of one's own. Abudulai, (2006) says nepotism tends to meet the personal ethnic racial or gender preference of the individual who perpetrates it. Four types of nepotism have been identified, namely family nepotism, paired nepotism (where a husband shows the favoritism to the wife) and organizational politics.

According to Laker & Williams (2003) nepotism is one of the least studied and most poorly understood Human Resource practice. It is in most cases classified as unethical organizational politics, seeking to satisfy personal gains to the detriment of the organization. Persons in authority are able to get into the employ of their organization family relations, thereby surrounding

themselves with people they can trust, to hold out for them based on blood ties. In their sycophantic posture these new hires "brothers", always give their consent to even the worst of decisions taken by their "sponsors" who "connected" them into the job position. Honest and free communication is nonexistent in the organization. Indiscipline becomes one of the results of such a practice; the boss's protégée remains untouchable. An unhealthy organization climate then breeds. Due to the inadequacy of skill and knowledge by such public sector employees who get into organizational membership through family links, competent staff will have to be employed to ensure successful performance on the job. The organization's manpower is thereby bloated. Redundant staff cannot be laid-off because of the 'home-town orientation'. This sequence of outcomes is the result of nepotism.

The private sector is also not immune to the symptoms of nepotism. There have been occasions in private sector organizations when a Chief Executive officer authorizes the Human Resource Manager to appoint a Higher National Diploma (HND) graduate with two months work experience and no management skills into a senior management position. By all standards the candidate cannot successfully perform in that capacity. In some instances HR Managers have lost their jobs for bringing to the attention of the boss the shortfalls in such a selection. The basis for their termination was the refusal to obey 'lawful' instructions. A panel of interviewers decide on a particular candidate to fill a vacancy, and yet when appointments are made they see that the powers that be have made a 'strategic' choice different from the one selected by consensus on the basis of merit.

Indiscipline, feelings of inequity, incompetence, inequitable reward schemes are a few disadvantages of nepotism so far advanced. Nepotism can bring about white collar crimes; it can perpetuate fraud because

relatives who are organizational members cover up for other relatives. Family disagreements, feuds and prejudices are publicized through nepotism.

Contrary to all the negative consequences some studies assign some benefits to the practice of nepotism. Are there two sides to every phenomenon? Laker and Williams (2003) "empirical studies show that family nepotism leads to higher performance, lower employee risk and lower turnover'.

Hillstorm (2007) asserts that in some businesses high performance, stability and long term commitment is a result of nepotism. Lower recruiting and training costs, higher levels of loyalty to leadership has been some of the results of nepotism. The strong commitment is due to the realization of long term personal benefit. Appropriate placement of the newly hired is certain, if nepotism is the mode of recruitment and selection, because the candidate's capabilities and shortcomings are known to the highly positioned relative (Jeffrey, 2004. *Keeping it in the Family: Special advantages and disadvantages of hiring friends and relatives small business sound off*).

Another interesting observation is that made by Lynn, (2000) in *Lawful Wedded Employees - Entrepreneur*, "nepotism as a selection policy promotes a balance between professional and personal life". In such instances nepotism is portrayed as an asset and not a liability. In Ghana some family businesses have been run successfully through this recruitment and selection practice. That does not rule out the fact that others have seen their business decline and their fortunes dwindle.

Training, Development and Paternalism

Training is a learning process that involves the acquisition of skills, concepts, rules, attitudes to increase the performance of employees.

Training and development is required in managing successful businesses. Strategic change implementation as earlier mentioned, brings in its wake change in the nature of jobs and hence assessment of individual capability as well as the identification of the individual's role in the change process. Development is gaining the experience, attitude and skill needed to become or remain an effective manager. Career plans and progress on career paths are essential components of development. The choice of one to participate in a training programme or a management development scheme does cause a brush with organizational politics. Paternalism is a noticeable attitude in the selection of staff for training by supervisors.

Ferris (2000) deliberating on the measurement of political skills concluded "we believe that effective use of political skill will become increasingly important to a manager's career". Albeit the objective of these learning activities is to achieve organizational goals, optimal benefits are not reaped if paternalism interferes with objectivity.

Paternalism describes a situation in which people are protected and their needs satisfied but they do not have any freedom. In the Ghanaian context, paternalism is the situation where persons in authority are encouraged to behave like fathers and uncles 'wofa', oldman 'numoe'. One would ask, is there anything wrong with such titles?

The answer is a "yes" and a "no". No, there is nothing wrong with the use of such terms in the work place, because superiors are often elderly people and good interpersonal relations do require that people show respect by using such titles for superiors. Yes, because nepotism creates a situation where blood relations, nephews and nieces are organizational members who place emphasis on family ties rather than corporate titles to their advantage. These uncles and, fathers' real or apparent become autocratic powers patroniz-

ing staff. To get in to the top man's good books, you have to kowtow, proffer no contrary view to his decisions, pay homage by passing by his/her office to fraternize etc. in return for nomination for training programs, conferences abroad, vehicle or bungalow allocation. Although there are rules and regulations that govern these privileges, room is made for discretionary use of power. Promotion, career progress and sponsorship for management development programs are then closely tied to playing the political game 'wisely'. Opportunistic tendencies thrive, one gains unfair advantage because of family ties, and not professional requirements.

In some private sector organizations performance appraisal exercises are occasions to display paternalistic tendencies. One has a mentor who pushes for the advancement of the one being mentored by 'hook or crook'. This protégé is tagged a 'high flyer', 'high potential' etc and this category of employee has his career fast-tracked. He is put on international assignment, given a wide exposure and generally pushed into the big circles where the political clout is exhibited. One without such a mentor stagnates and is not even given the opportunity to prove himself.

The solution to these negative tendencies is for the top hierarchy in organizations to lead and manage on the principles of equity and fairness. One would not be far from wrong to view nepotism and paternalism as a negation of the merit and equal opportunity principle which does not advance corporate goals.

It is also expedient to point out that politics and influence are not the same. But there is surely a clear correlation between those who have the most comprehensive network and those who are adjudged the most effective.

Conclusion

This article has presented Organizational Politics as a factor in organizational performance. A closer look needs to be taken at the impact of ethical politics on performance and human relations as competitive strategy. Organizational politics certainly has benefits, and the realization of the benefits of the practice of organizational politics lies with both individual employees and leadership. A human resource management focus, reviews nepotism and paternalism as forms of organizational politics that demands attention. The individual employee therefore assesses the tide of political stakes in their environment; and determines how well they can maneuver the tide. Individuals should however accept that to have political will, in the corporate world, is a must not a choice. It is equally a necessity to acquire political skills to survive and a requirement for a fulfilling work life. Although subtle, as organizational

members, we exhibit or respond to politics. Eschewing unethical politics is a way to commit the workforce and ensure the long term success of organizations. The good, the bad and the ugly of the phenomenon named Organizational Politics makes it an attractive focal topic for our time. It is recommended that Human Resource Management practitioners champion organizational politics in a positive direction. Some consideration must be given to studying organizational politics as a mainstream discipline. The acquisition of political savvy is highly recommended to anyone interested in sustained advancement in a business career.

Effective leadership, exhibiting political skills, can get a consensus that transcends impossible personality barriers thereby ensuring achievement of set performance standards.

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