The Influence of Power and Politics in Organizations (Part 1)

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ABSTRACT

Organizations are made up of both human and material resources. It is the human resources of an organization that transform or convert the material resources of the organization into finished or consumable products. In trying to transform/convert the material resources of the organization, choices have to be made. Choices as to the type or kind of product to be produced, different materials to be used in order to have the desired product, the type of machinery to be adopted for production efficiency, the financial resources to be involved and its sources, etc. In any of these decisions, choices have to be made. These decisions or choices involve some kind of politics while the person making the choices or decisions uses some power to ensure that his/her choices or decisions are accepted. Thus, the influence of power and politics in organizations presents a political analysis of intraorganizational relations in which power play and politics is normal. In any organization, we look up to people/human resources for support. This accounts for the inevitability of organizational politics and power play. An understanding of organizational politics requires an analysis of power, coalitions, and bargaining. The power relationship is the contest for political action and encompasses the most basic issues underlying organizational politics. Infact, survival in an organization is a political act.

KEYWORDS: *Influence, power, politics, organizations, human resources*

INTRODUCTION

Organizations are organized bodies of persons or systems. They are neither the rational, harmonious entities celebrated in managerial theory nor the arenas of apocalyptic class conflict projected by Marxists. Rather, it may be argued, a more suitable notion lies somewhere between these two, a concept of organizations as politically negotiated orders (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980). Survival in any organization is a political act. Thus, organizational life is dominated by political interactions. Politics in organizations involve the tactical use of power to retain or obtain control of real symbolic resources (Bacharach, et al, 1980). Organizational

structures are emergent entities. They are the result of the conscious political decisions of particular actors and interest groups.

The comparative studies of organizations by sociologists in the last three to four decades have, for the most part, adopted an apolitical view of organizations. This view point may be attributed to a narrow interpretation of Max Weber's (1947) approach to organizations. Sociologists have spent a disproportionate amount of time trying to prove or disprove the plausibility of Weber's ideal construct of bureaucracy. It is safe to say that Weber remains the most cited organizational theorist; however, the narrowness of his impact is best exemplified by the fact that the pages of his work most frequently cited by organizational researchers are those few where he presents his ideal typical model of the organization (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980).

While it is true that Weber specified some of the primary dimensions of organizational structure, it is also true that he viewed organizational structure as emerging from the conscious political decisions of interest groups within or outside the organization. For Weber, organizations are not simply rationally determined systems of interdependent structures. They are also systems in which political tension among interest groups can emerge and re-emerge.

Bacharach (1978) observes that students working within the structural tradition of Blau and Schoenherr (1964) have been guided by two assumptions that inhibit the development of a political interpretation of intraorganizational dynamics. First, they have tended to cast organizations as normatively integrated systems, thereby ignoring political conflicts and other tensions. Secondly, they tend to view the organization as a holistic entity, and this view overlooks such organizational sub-units as interest groups and coalitions, which are crucial to the development of a political perspective of intra- organizational behaviours. In other words, organizations are not inherently apolitical. Rather, such a characterization may be an artifact of a given theoretical perspective, especially one that emphasizes normative integration and maintenance of the total organization (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980).

From the work of Dahrendor (1959), it is clear that three groups appear to be critical to the development of a political analysis of organizations:

(a) Work groups: This may be based on departmental differences, differences in departmental work activity, or differences prescribed by the organizational hierarchy.
(b) Interest groups: This may be defined as groups of actors who are aware of the commonality of their goals and commonality of their fate beyond simply their interdependence with regard to the conduct of work.
(c) Coalition: A coalition may be defined as grouping of interest groups who are committed to achieving a common goal. They are based on the joint action of two or more interest groups against other interest groups.

From the above, a political analysis must be concerned mainly with the nature of power across groupings in the organization and the specification of tactics and countertactics that groups employ (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980).

In emphasizing work groups, interest groups, and coalitions as units of analysis, it is believed that individuals become political in groups, and that groups are capable of effecting and often do effect organizational structure. In the same vein, if organizations are to be understood as political systems, we must come to grips with how, when and why groups mobilize power. Thus, let us now explore the subject of power more deeply.

POWER
Definitions of Power
Like many other words in english language, power has no single definition. A few definitions of power are stated below:

(i) "Power is the ability to employ force and mobilize resources, energy and information on behalf of a preferred goal" – Gbadamosi (1996)

(ii) "Power is the probability that a person can carry out his or her own will despite resistance" – Max Weber (1947)

(iii) "Power is the ability of persons as groups to impose their will on others despite resistance through deterrence either in the form of withholding regularly supplied rewards or in the form of punishment inasmuch as the former, as well as the latter, constitutes in effect negative sanction" – Blan (1964)

(iv) "Power is defined as a force that results in behaviour that would not have occurred if the forces had not been present" – Mechanic (1962)

(v) "[Power is] the ability of one person or group of persons to influence the behaviour of others, that is, to change the probabilities that others will respond in certain ways to specified stimuli" – Kaplan (1964)

(vi) "Power is a capacity that 'A' has to influence the behaviour of 'B' to do things he or she would not otherwise do" – (cited in Obisi, 2003).

From the different definitions of power given above, it is quite evident that sanctions are an inherent aspect of a power relationship. Though the specific ways in which the sanctions are manifested in a relationship vary with the social setting, sanction can be treated in terms of two probability dimensions on a formal level:

(a) the probability using sanctions; and

(b) the probability of successful sanctions.

Not withstanding the specific content, power can be partially portrayed in terms of these formal probabilities.

Subjective Nature of Power
Power is the ability a person has to influence another. The extent of this power is, however, determined, to a large extent, by the perception of the term power by the person at whom the power is directed. It may be more important what a person thinks a superior officer's power is than what in reality it is. Managers may take advantage of this phenomenon by pretending they have more power than they actually have, that is, by bluffing. If a manger's bluffing succeeds, the effect is exactly the same as if the one bluffing actually possessed the formal power. Thus, power is a delicate phenomenon. This is because of the influence of subjective factors, including ethical and moral considerations (Obisi, 2003).

The Uses of Power
Power, when acquired, is meant to be used to achieve some purpose(s). Appropriate use of power leads to the achievement of desired goals and objectives. Ineffective use of power or failure to use power when the need arises has been described as the major cause of defective functioning of a system. This is possible among inexperienced managers and those who lack

self-confidence. They tend to avoid using power, preferring to pass problems with difficult employees and the like to others (Obisi, 2003).

The organizational consequences of not using power appropriately become increasingly pronounced toward the top of an organization because in hierarchical systems abdications of authority have effects all the way down the line. Yet, trying to use power that one does not have (because of legal constraints, for instance) can be equally detrimental. This is true because managerial actions with regards to employees may be reversed by labour relations, board decisions (where it exists), the courts, arbitrators and the power of public pressure at considerable cost to the company. Thus, judicious and effective use of power is one of the most difficult lessons a manager has to learn (Obisi, 2003).

BASES AND SOURCES OF POWER
Bases of Power

There is need to make a distinction between BASES of power and SOURCES of power. This distinction has important implications for the authority-influence contrast. In dealing with the bases of power, we are interested in what parties control that enables them to manipulate the behaviour of others. In referring to the sources of power we are speaking of how parties come to control the bases of power.

French and Raven (1959) distinguish six major bases of power. They include:

(a) COERCION – this implies the threat of decreasing another's outcomes. The holder can apply punishment or sanction;

(b) 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;

(c) REWARDS – this implies the promise of increasing the outcomes of the employer. The holder of this can give or withhold something desired;

(d) 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;

(e) REFERENT POWER – this is more interpersonal in nature than legitimacy. It means power based on identification with another. This is exemplified by the power of charismatic leaders who elicit deference and are accorded credibility by others (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980). The individual influenced desires to model his/her behavioUr to the source of influence; and

(f) 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.

Given the contrast of bases and sources of power, Etzioni (1961) provides a somewhat better starting point. Unlike French and Raven, Etzioni appears to maintain a consistent focus on the bases of power. He identifies three forms of power, each relying on a different type of sanction:

i.   **Coercive Power:** rests on the ability to apply the threat of physical sanction;
ii. **Remunerative Power:** based on the control of material resources and reward; and
iii. **Normative Power:** based on the control of symbolic rewards.

An additional basis for power needs to be added to Etzoni's three. In an organizational setting, access to information, that is, KNOWLEDGE, also becomes a basis of power.

When an actor in an organization controls unique information and when that information is needed to make a decision, the actor has power (Pettigrew, 1973). Drawing on the Etzoni and the French and Raven schemes, we can identify four primary bases of power: (i) coercive, (ii) remunerative, (iii) normative, and (iv) knowledge. The coercive base of power is the control of punishment; the remunerative base is the control of rewards; the normative base is the control of symbols; and the knowledge base is the control of information. Any power relationship in an organization can encompass all these bases, but each relationship may well be characterized by one of them rather than another (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980).

Sources of Power

Having identified the primary bases of power, attention must now turn to the different Sources of power. There are about four main sources of power. These include:

(a) **Office or Structural Position:** The office or structural position might provide a party access to various bases of power. Some positions might provide little information but substantial coercive resources, while others might give the occupant the capacity to manipulate symbols or mobilize internalized commitments to certain norms (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980).

(b) **Personal Characteristics:** The most marked personal characteristic that is a source of power is charisma. As Weber (1947) indicates, the charismatic leader has power by virtue of extraordinary and often mystical characteristics. However, relevant personal characteristics might also include verbal skill, ability to argue effectively for positions, or even physical attributes (for example, a physical disability of a veteran espousing a pro- or antiwar position).

(c) **Expertise:** Expertise refers to the specialized information actors bring to the organization. It is typically based on activities outside the organization, for example, education. This is treated as a source of power, rather than a basis of power in French and Raven's terms, because it seems to be a means by which a party comes to control specialized information rather than the control itself (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980).

(d) **OPPORTUNITY:-** This particular source of power is embedded in the informal structure of the organization. The idea comes from Mechanic's (1962) analysis of the power of the lower levels in an organization (such as sectorial staff). The informal aspects of formal positions or informal positions that are not identified officially by the organization can provide an important source of power (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980).

AUTHORITY AND POWER RELATIONS

A manager may have the authority (right) to do something but may lack the power (ability) to do it. On the other side of the coin, one may have the power to do something, but may lack the authority to do it. Any of these two conditions describes an unstable organization. Failure to

match power and authority adequately at all levels cause conflict in the organization. In extreme cases, this disequilibrium may lead to destruction of the organization, perhaps even to bloodshed. Obisi (1996) was at pain to point out how the Nigerian management fails to match power with authority. Inability to balance power with authority may lead to conflict and in extreme cases bring individuals and organizations to enormous pain.

One of the most important jobs of managers at all levels is to provide subordinates with equal authority and power. That is, the subordinate should, for organizational stability, have means (power) equal to their right (authority) to do the things necessary to accomplish their part of the organization's objectives (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980).

When power and authority for a given person or position are roughly matched, we have a condition we may call legitimate power or workable authority. Achieving a state of legitimate power or workable authority at all levels in the organization is a goal toward which managers should strive (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980).

RELATIONSHIP OF SOURCES, BASES AND TYPES OF POWER

So far, two types of power (authority and influence), four bases of power, and four sources of power have been identified. The table below presents the relationship among these aspects of power and it enables us to relate the sources and bases to the authority-influence distinction. It could be argued that all the bases of power could be generated from each source in a given context.

Relationship of Sources, Bases and Types of Power

	SOURCE	TYPE	BASES
a.	Structure	Authority	Coercion Remunerative Normative Knowledge
b.	Personality	Influence	Normative Knowledge
c.	Expertise	Influence	Normative Knowledge
d.	Opportunity	Influence	Coercion Knowledge

Relationship of Sources, Bases and Types of Power. Adapted from *Power and Politics in Organizations* p. 36. Bacharach, et al, (1980).

The table above helps to illustrate some of the contrasts between authority and influence. First, authority and influence rely on different sources of power. Authority is based mainly on structural sources of power, whereas influence can be grounded in any of the other sources. Second, the relevance of the four bases of power depends on the power source, and this also has significant implications for the authority-influence contrast. In a given structural context, one or more of the power bases may be constrained or limited by the structure, but on a general theoretical level authority implies all four bases of power. On the whole, all four bases of power should characterize authority relations (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980).

FLOW OF POWER

The treatment of dimensions of authority implies that authority as a form of power is mainly unidirectional. This means that it typically flows from the top or higher levels downward. That is, it applies solely to superior-subordinate relationships and deals with the power of superiors over subordinates. However, the treatment of power implies that subordinates can also exercise power, and that power is actually multidirectional. Influence, of course, is the multidirectional aspect of power. It is the mode of power that both gives subordinates the capability of manipulating superiors and gives superiors the capability of getting more from their subordinates than is specified in the formal role obligations (Barcharach, et al, 1980).

The literature of organizations stresses the authority aspect of power. This is reflected in the long-standing concern with centralization and decentralization. Viewed from this literature, power flows down from the top of the organization. Power is something allocated by a higher echelon to a lower echelon in the hierarchy of the organization. This unidirectional and managerial view of power is an integral element of rationalistic consensual models of organizations. The major gap in this approach is the failure to consider that power may also be taken by the lower echelon. The organizational literature places emphasis on power given by the top while neglecting the possibility that subordinates will take power beyond that given to them in the organizational structure. This additional side of power – the taking of power – must be a central concern of the political model of organizations. Individuals and subgroups within organizations are not passive recipients awaiting the downward trickle of power but rather active participants mobilizing power for their own ends. Thus, a political approach to organizations implies a multidirectional image of power, and this means an emphasis on influence apart from, as well as in the context of, the authority structure (Barcharach and Lawler, 1980).

ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

The term politics is derived from the Greek word "politics" meaning a city or state. It was originally used by Aristotle (384-322) in his book POLITICS to mean the affairs of Greek city or state. In his view, man is a political animal who by interacting with another or more persons produces a relationship called political. Lasswell (1951) writes that politics is essentially the struggle for positions of power and influence by which those who succeed in monopolizing such positions in society are able to make decisions that affect the lives of every citizen within the country. By implication, politics can be practiced by all persons in both governments and

organizations with the objective to struggle for power, influence, conflict, bargaining, reconciliation, resolution and consensus. Thus, there are two types of politics, namely: state politics and organizational politics. Here, we will concentrate mainly on organizational politics.

Organizational politics relates to behaviours that are outside those in which the organization has taken a specific position for or against, the behaviors are intended to obtain selfish and individual ends that are opposed to the ends of others in the organization. Organizational politics may focus on the goals of groups as well as individuals and they may well involve behaviours that are harmful to the organization as a whole. They appear to be inevitable but at the same time there are wide variations from organization to organization. Ethical issues often come to the fore and bargaining is an important consideration in organizational politics (Obisi, 2003).

Organizational politics create very ambivalent responses because people look at the whole process both negatively and positively, depending on the particular perspective they have in mind. However, those who are successful in organizational politics tend to be viewed positively perhaps because they are successful competitors in other respects as well.

Recent research works unfold that political matters of this kind are a frequent topic of conversation and that the most frequent issues are interdepartmental coordination, delegation of authority, and promotions or transfers. A common concern is the promotion of a less competent person based on favouritism. Inherent in this and many others politicized situations are the influencing of performance evaluations, positively for oneself and negatively for competitors, and the influencing of authority allocations, as between one work union and another or between supervisor and subordinate.

It is important to explain that organizational politics become more prevalent and more important for the individual at each higher level of management as the competition becomes rougher. The following table suggests that tactics used also change with management level and the kinds of people who are effective politicians are somewhat different. There is enough evidence that strategic decisions at the levels of the organizations may well be influenced politically. For example, new company location may be influenced by the desires of top people regarding where they would like to live or visit. It appears that such a reason may influence the location of a company's headquarter. In Nigeria, such desires have influenced the location of many projects which today turned out to be white elephant projects, all in attempt to satisfy certain interest (Obisi, 2003).

RANKING OF TACTICS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD POLITICIANS FREQUENCY OF MENTION

Tactical Approaches	Chief Executive Officers	High-level Staff Manager	First Level Supervisors
Attacking or blaming others; scape goating	1	2	3
Withholding, distorting overwhelming	2	1	2

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information			
Developing base of support for one's idea	3	4	7
Creating a favourable image; Impression management	4	3	1
Developing strong allies and forming power coalitions	5	7	5
Praising others; ingratiating oneself with others.	6.5 }tie	6	4
Associating with influential people	6.5	5	8

Source: Adapted from Robert W. Allen, et al. "Organizational Politics. Tactics and Characteristics of its Actions" *Califonia Management Review (Fall 1979)* pp. 78-80.

FREQUENTLY NOTED CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD POLITICIANS

Sensitive	Sensitive	Competent
Articulate	Articulate	Popular
Ambitious	Ambitious	
Aggressive		
Intelligent	Socially adapt	Devious
Organization man	Competent, Self-confident, Logical	

Source: Adapted from Robert W. Allen, et al. "Organizational Politics. Tactics and Characteristics of its Actions," *Califonia Management Review (Fall 1979)* p. 78-80.

POLITICAL TACTICS

The above table provides an idea of the types of political tactics widely used. All the approaches are among the most frequently used but there are notable differences among them. Interestingly, attacking or blaming others is noted by at least 50 per cent of the

managers in all three categories; competition is clearly a prime force in organizational politics. Furthermore, a number of the approaches involve establishing a strong bargaining position.

Some Suggested Political Tactics

The following are some of the political tactics proposed to achieve a competitive advantage. These tactics have their origin in practical experience.

- Expert influence over the time and place of your bargaining efforts so that these conditions are selected to support your goals. In many cases, it is advisable to bargain in your home territory.
- It is a desirable bargaining tactic to disguise your true interests for as long as possible; to be overly eager for a given outcome may leave you at a district disadvantage with regard to other related considerations.
- Shoot for the moon initially so that you can then settle for less but do not use this tactic too often with the same person.
- Identify any weaknesses that adversaries may have and continually work on and publicize them.
- Where the opposition consists of a loosely assembled coalition try to point out the differences within the coalition and any common interests you have with each member, thus attempting to divide and conquer.
- Establish alliances with superiors, peers, and subordinates so that when needed they can be counted to be on your side.
- Select subordinates who are not only competent but reliable, dependable and, above all else, loyal.
- Do not get yourself in a position of relying on an adversary's expertise: if you are not knowledgeable in an area, secure your own expert and take steps to establish his or her credibility.
- Do not injure another person who is or might well be in a position to take revenge.
- Do not do anything to alienate or anger former colleagues when leaving a position; bridges that have been burned may be needed unexpectedly.
- If a proposal developed by an adversary is unattractive but cannot be thwarted immediately, attempt to refer it to a committee to delay it and widen the bargaining area.
- If the outcome is uncertain, it is often desirable to support the aggressive efforts of someone else rather than take the lead oneself. That way, it may be easier to get the ship early if it happens to sink.
- In dealing with an adversary, try to leave the door open so that communication is not closed off and differences can still be resolved if necessary.
- Avoid dealing in personalities, never attack the adversary personally and focus on real facts and issues.Choose when and under what circumstances a vote should be used to settle an issue. Let matters go to a vote for resolution only when you know you have a majority.

Based on Richard H. Buskirk, *Handbook of Managerial Tactics* (Boston: Calners, 1976) and Robert W. Memurry, "Power and the Ambitious Executive". *Harvard Business Review* (November – December, 1973).

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In the same vein, the questionnaire model can be used to explain the nature of organizational politics. This model is contained in the table below and it is presented here not because it represents a well-researched standardized measure but the questions provide a further indication of what we see in the organization. The questionnaire is normally scored by giving one point for each "mostly agree" answer. It takes a score of sixteen or more to conclude that a strong inclination toward playing politics exists.

POLITICAL ORIENTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Instruction: answer each question, "Mostly Agree" or "Mostly Disagree", even if it is difficult for you to decide which alternative best describes your opinion.

		Mostly Agree	Mostly Disagree
1.	Only a fool would correct a boss's mistake	-	-
2.	If you have certain confidential information, you will release it to your advantage	-	-
3.	I would be careful not to hire a subordinate with more formal education than myself	-	-
4.	If you do somebody a favor remember to cash in on it.	-	-
5.	Given the opportunity, I would cultivate friendship with powerful people.	-	-
6.	I like the idea of saying nice things about a rival in order to get that person transferred from my department.	-	-
7.	Why not take credit for someone else's work? They would do the same to you.	-	-
8.	Given the chance, I would offer to help my boss build some shelves for his/her den.	-	-
9.	I laugh heartily at my boss's jokes even when they are not funny…	-	-
10.	I would be sure to attend a company picnic even if I had the chance to do something I enjoyed more that day….	-	-
11.	If I knew an executive in my company was stealing money, I would use that against him/her in asking for favor.	-	-
12.	I would first find out my boss's political preferences before discussing politics with him/her.	-	-
13.	I think using memo to zap somebody for his/her mistake is a good idea (especially when you want to show that person up).	-	-

14.	If I wanted something done by co-workers I would be willing to say if you don't get this done, our boss might be very unhappy.	-	-
15.	I would invite my boss to a party at my house even if I did not like him/her	-	-
16.	When I'm in a position to, I would have lunch with the "right people" at least twice a week.	-	-
17.	Richard M. Nixon's bugging the democratic headquarters would have been a clever idea if he had not been caught.	-	-
18.	Power for it's own sake is one of life's most precious commodities.	-	-
19.	Having a high school named after you would be an incredible thrill.	-	-
20.	Reading about job politics is as much fun as reading an adventure story.	-	-

Source: *Andrew J.Dubrin. "Human Relations: A Job Oriented Approach; 1978. Reprinted with permission of Reston Publishing Company, 11480 Sunset Hill Road, Reston VA 22090.*

WHAT ARE ORGANIZATIONS?

Organization is formed from the word "organize". The word organize, itself, means to put in working order; to arrange in a system. This means to organize involves two things: humans and materials. Thus, an organization can be said to be an organized body of persons or organized system. Organizations are made up of individuals, groups and structures. In every organization, especially business organizations, a lot of work and effort is required to achieve goals and objectives.

Some writers maintain that organizations are political systems (Cyert and March, 1963; Crazier, 1964; Thompson, 1967; Karpik, 1972). Yes, organizations are political organizations since they are made up of human beings. Human beings, themselves, are political animals. And politics is at play in any place where there are choices to be made. Choice making is politics at work.

To get things done in organizations, the why, how, who, when and where of things should and must be analysed, discussed and explained in order to make organizations develop, survive, expand and grow by utilizing the skills and capacity of the human and material resources within and to some extent outside the organization because no organization is an island unto itself. An organization survives to the extent that its surrounding environment is conclusive for it to exist (Obisi, 2003).

ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATES

Ever wonder why we form groups and organizations? Organizations exist to meet certain needs and achieve definite purposes.

The success of any organization can be measured by asking to what extent they have achieved their purpose. Organizations have at least two easily identifiable sets of needs, namely, task needs and people needs.

Task needs present the function of the work done by the organization. A school, for example, needs adequate supplies and materials, properly trained personnel, appropriate physical facilities, sufficient funds to operate, input from parents and community agencies, and strategies for putting programmes into action.

People needs occur simply because people work within organizations. People bring with them needs for belonging, achievement, recognition self-worth, identity, integrity, as well as others such as financial security. Through the interaction between individuals within organizations, to some extent, they find their people-needs met (D'spuza, 2008).

Any broad effort directed toward improving an organization's success must necessarily focus on:

i.   increasing the efficiency of the organization's task activities, i.e., better meeting the task needs; and
ii. maximizing the possibility for human growth within the organization, such as better ways to meet people needs.

When speaking of improving the effectiveness of the organization, it seems useful to break down these concerns into parts, treating human growth and development as different from the task of the organization. People working alone or in collaboration with others can carry out the myriad of tasks of organizations. Every effective organization has needs that they meet by performing certain tasks, as well as those they meet by developing human relationships (D'Souza, 2008).

THE CONCEPT OF CLIMATE

Individuals have moods and feelings. So do organizations, and this is called climate. Outsiders often feel or sense the climate better than the group itself. They may experience the climate as peaceful, angry, charged, tense, vigorous, or fast paced. People immersed in a group have difficulty in sensing the group's climate. If the group climate is one of threat and attack, individuals sense their own reaction of fear, or of desire to withdraw, even though they may not understand the climate (D'Souza, 2008).

The group climate is the predominant feeling tone of a group (i.e., the quality of their being together). Individuals sense the climate through their own emotional reactions. For a group to diagnose or name its own climate, each individual has to report and share his/her observation of the group's behaviour. If everyone openly and honestly reports these observations the group can look at the pooled observations for patterns of group behaviour. From this composite they can make a statement of the group's climate. For example, in a group of ten, if three people say they observed people arguing, three report they observed people interrupting each other, four report that they saw people withdraw by non-participation while others involved themselves in a tug-of-war with feelings such as resentment and hurt,

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they can label the group as a high-threat climate arising from hurtful or angry competition (D'Souza, 2008).

GROUP ASPIRATION

At the same time, a group may have or be able to develop common aspirations about what it wants its climate to be. Just as individuals have values that provide an ideal about what they want to be, groups can do the same out of common, shared values that create motivation for improving their climate.

If the members of the group can share their observations of each other's behaviour, reflect together and label the group climate, they learn that they share a sense of dissatisfaction. Upon reflection, group members may indicate that they would like a climate in which they feel safer, more secure, and more able to express themselves without attacking others or being attacked. This group aspires at that point to a climate characterized by mutual support.

NORMS OR OPERATIVE VALUES

According to D'Souza (2008), to change the group's climate, the groups norms (or operative values) must change. Norms are implicit ground rules that a group operates by. Members individually conform and seldom deviate from these norms impulsively or unilaterally without receiving a negative or coercive response from the group.

In a group, an implicit norm says, "displays of emotion are a sign of weakness". In that atmosphere, individuals will rarely show emotion. If they do, the group will attempt to control the emotion (tune it down, explain it away, or show open disapproval) or withdraw from the individual until he/she has regained control. The group does this by such things as changing the subject of discussion, silence, no one shows any response, group members break eye contact with the emotional individual, or people leave the room.

D'Souza (2008) further states that people rarely identify this operative value directly. If members observed that each time a point of difference or disagreement arose between two group members, the remainder of the group anxiously rushed in to change the subject, to assure the two people their view points were not in conflict and that they really meant the same thing, or that the difference was only a sanantic problem, then observers can infer that a powerful norm in this group demanded that the members cover up, avoid, or harmonize differences at all cost.

In this instance, group members share an operative unconsciously or by implicit mutual expectations (D'Souza, 2008).

CHANGING CLIMATE BY CHANGING NORMS

According to D'Souza (2008), groups can change climates by:
1.   identifying the present climate;
2.   developing a common desire for a new one;
3.   identifying the operative values in the group that generate the less desirable climate. Groups do this by:
      (a)   having each individual report observed behaviour, and looking for behavioural patterns; and

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(b) inferring the norm or common expectation that underlies the pattern;

4. this makes the norm reach a level of consciousness so that the group can reflect and choose to change it. In this way, the group begins to gain control of its climate;

5. the group introduces the behaviours they want to change or they specify the new norms and expectations they want to create; and

6. groups do not change climates simply by sharing, developing awareness, and holding common desires. Individuals must change their behaviour towards other members and group events for the climate to change. Unless people change their own behaviour, the group climate cannot improve.

ETHICS AND LEGITIMACY

Whether a certain type of political behaviour can be viewed as ethical must be judged against some model or criterion. Behaviour may be evaluated in terms of the utilitarian model (the greatest good for the greatest number), the right model (an individual right should not be violated) or the justice model (there should be fair and equitable distribution of benefits and burdens). Ideally, all three models should be applied and behaviour should meet all three tests to be considered ethical. Yet, there are cases where conflicts occur or information is limited so that it is not entirely clear what is ethical.

A somewhat different consideration is whether the behaviour involved is considered within or outside the organization's normal and acceptable range. Where certain political behaviours are viewed as illegitimate, severe sanctions may be brought to bear against those who engage in them (Obisi, 2003).

TYPES OF POLTICAL BEHAVIOUR

The table below provides a way of looking at political behaviors and method of distinguishing between what is likely to be considered legitimate and illegitimate activities.

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PATTERN OF POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR IN ORGANIZATIONS

	Internal to the organization		External to the organization	
Direction or political behavior	Legitimate behavior	Illegitimate behavior	Legitimate behavior	Illegitimate behavior
Vertical (up) and down the hierarchy	Direct voice complain to supervisor	Sabotage symbiotic protests mutinies Riots	Law/suits against the firm	Whistle blowing to the public regarding organization
	By-passing claim of command obstructionism so that policies are not implemented			
	Coalition formation exchange of favors reprisals			
Horizontal (across) the hierarchy		Physical threats from another organization outside professional activity	Talks with counterpart from another organization outside professional activity	A defection to competitor organization and duplicity such as spying.

Adapted from Dan Farrell and James C.Peterson. "Pattern of Political Behavior in Organizations." *Academy of Management Review (July, 1982).*

AWKWARD AND DEMORALIZING INFLUENCES IN NIGERIAN ORGANIZATIONS
According to Obisi (2003), the nature of power play and interplay of politics in Nigerian organizations is significant owing to the developing nature of her industrial base. Another important fact is that most of the giant companies in Nigeria are conglomerates whose politics and procedures are formulated in the parent company's home and as such make organizational politics very interesting.

However, power and politics started to emerge in the 1980s when the nation started to experience large-scale unemployment. The major interference from this revelation is that struggle and influence became a major instrument of control. People became aware of the

great values airing from high positions and influential decisions, hence they work towards them through power manipulation and interplay of politics (Obisi, 2003).

Evidence indicates that power and politics have not been in the overall interest of the organization and this also applies to organizations in Nigeria. This is true because some highly qualified and experienced personnel are in most cases ruined by organizational politics. Also, some otherwise good policies are dropped because of unfavorable influential interests.

Power and politics could be negative as well as positive, depending on their application. Aristotle opines that man is by nature a political animal and he who is otherwise is either above humanity or below it. Fielder (1967) avers in his contingency theory of leadership that a leader can contribute towards the effectiveness of his or her organization depending on the degree of power he or she wields. Obisi (1996) agrees with Fielder that the cornerstone of every leadership is power and influence. If a leader or superior has more power with regards to workers' conditions of service and career growth and such other areas as dismissals, punishments, promotions, etc., such leaders are deemed to have more influence on their followers or subordinates.

However, instances of abuse of power and politics are rampant in Nigerian organizations. Organizational politics and manipulations have become the order of the day instead of a well contrived organizational development.

Nigerian organizations have made specific mistakes by believing that a bridge that has been burned may not be needed any longer. In various organizations, including universities, we run people down, and see superiors suppressing their subordinates for fear of their rising to their levels. We also see managers and heads of departments jettisoning some of the good deeds of their predecessors, as they do not want to give honour to whom honour is due. In addition, we see misplacement of reward in organizations. The doctorate degree is supposed to be the climate of scholarship, but in Nigerian organizations it stands for pulling down. All this is wrong. They are examples of negative and awkward organizational politics (Obisi, 2003).

We should not always believe in the concept of survival of the fittest. It could be the law of the jungle. Why is it that we turn a blind eye to the wrongs we and those we like do but react to the wrongs those we do not like do? Hypocrisy, sycophancy, arbitrariness and whimsicalness are the backbone of negative organizational politics.

This brings to focus the nature of the structure of organizational power and politics in Nigeria. Due to tribal sentiments, the quality of power struggle and organizational politics is so low. People simply support narrow views all in an attempt to purify blood or ethic relationship. Thus, organizations in Nigeria are grossly affected by the negative impact of power and politics (Obisi, 2003).

REMEDIES OF NEGATIVE IMPACT OF ORGNIZATIONAL POWER AND POLITICS
Negative power and politics within the organization as earlier pointed out do not augur well for the growth and productivity of the organization. The question, therefore, is how can management minimize the negative impact of power and politics? The view is here held that bargaining and communication can be used to speed up the rate of organizational cooperation. Bernard (1968) accepted this view by formulating his principles of organizational communication system for maintaining formal authority.
This is as shown below.

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BERNARD'S PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS FOR MAINTAINING FORMAL AUTHORITY

Premises:

1. Communication has presumption of authority when it originates at sources of organization information, communication center – better than individual sources.
2. Some people have superior ability. Their knowledge and understanding regardless of position command respect. This is the authority of leadership.

Accordingly:

3. When the authority of leadership is combined with the authority of position, people who have an established connection with an organization generally will grant authority, accepting orders far outside the zone of indifference.

Principles:

1. Channels of communication should be definitely known;
2. Objective authority requires a definite formal channel of communication to every member of an organization;
3. The line of communication must be as direct or short as possible;
4. The complete line of communication must be used;
5. The competence of the persons serving as communication centers, that is, officers, supervisory heads, etc. must be adequate; and
6. Every communication should be authenticated…. The person communicating must be known actually to occupy the position of authority concerned, that is, it is within its authority and it actually is an authorized communication from his office.

Adapted from Bernard. The Functions of the Executive Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, (1968), pp. 173-81.

Thus, if adequate communication process is applied, conflicts and frictions that will develop into power tussle and organizational politics will be diminished.

SUMMARY

Power and politics in organizations attempts to present a political analysis of intra organizational relations in which the key dimensions of such an approach are theoretically examined.

An understanding of organizational politics requires an analysis of power, coalitions, and bargaining. The power relationship is the context for political action and encompasses the most basic issues underlying organizational politics. As the primary mechanism through which individuals and subgroups acquire, maintain and use power, coalitions crystallize and bring to the foreground the conflicting interests of organizational subgroups. Through bargaining, distinct coalitions attempt to achieve their political objectives and protect themselves from encroachments by opposing coalitions.

Organizational politics is normal and every individual who works in organizations should play politics. However, positive organizational politics should be played while negative politics should be avoided.

CONCLUSION

It is a matter of imperative that every organization must beware of coercive power and the negative impact of organizational politics. Organizations that are in the threshold of prosperity should carry along the sectional interest in order to reduce frustration, friction and conflicts. Organizations are neither the rational, harmonious entities celebrated in managerial theory nor the arenas of apocalyptic class conflict projected by Marxists. Rather, it may be argued, a more suitable notion lies somewhere between these two – a concept of organizations as politically negotiated orders. Adopting this view, it can be observed, that organizational actors in their daily transactions perpetually bargain, repeatedly form and reform coalitions and constantly avail themselves of influence tactics (Barcharach, et al, 1980). Thus, survival in an organization is a political act. Corporations, universities, and voluntary associations are arenas for daily political action. Politics in organizations involve the tactical use of power to retain or obtain control of real or symbolic resources. Organizational structures are emergent entities, that is, they are the result of the conscious political decisions of particular actors and interest groups (Barcharach, et al, 1980).

Consequently, bargaining and communication have been recommended as a ready tool to reduce unhealthy organizational power tussle and politics. This is the tonic organizations need in this modern age. Old ways must pass away and new but better ways of doing things must be found and adopted for use.

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