

## ***Managing office politics***

Most managers are clear on their responsibilities in regard to people, process and products/services. Many, however, are less clear in facilitating the intangibles of office politics that provide the framework for different perceptions that influence organizational behavior.

These perceptions often facilitate a climate of ambiguity among the people who work in an organization, where the facts are often not supported by clear evidence. As a result, employees are left to convert their perception into some defined meaning – often a breeding ground for conflict, competition and misunderstanding of facts, intentions and reality.

Office politics can create a climate where people are motivated to use whatever influence they have to taint the facts in a favorable light that supports their personal interests or even goals.

Individual political agendas can result in a person – without having all the facts – justifying their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors to try to prove their point of view.

Unfortunately, there are times when these actions can be damaging to others, especially when individuals present only their point of view and have no concern for other perceptions or circumstances.

Managers understand there is often no escaping office politics, and research suggests not paying attention to or dismissing their importance is often at their own risk. For example, unmanaged politics can negatively impact both personal and career satisfaction.

Each individual in an organization comes with a different set of values, goals and experiences that if not aligned can lead to conflict. Organizations don't have unlimited resources, so decisions as to how things will be done unfortunately are not always made with all the facts.

Managers are more effective when they don't make assumptions and are committed to getting facts from all parties involved, as they know political agendas sometimes drive behavior.

Office politics can be complex to navigate. For example, organizational standards are based on facts that are often open to interpretation. Consider how one employee can believe their actions equal top performance while another may define their performance as average. This occurs because of conflicting definitions based on different values and beliefs.



One of the negative consequences of employee engagement is office politics that result in increased job anxiety, stress and turnover, as well as decreased job satisfaction and performance. The sad reality is many employees are afraid to act.

Politically astute leaders understand the importance of having safe conflict resolution processes in place and ensuring all employees are treated fairly. They don't tolerate actions that could damage an employee without all the facts, as they understand too often facts are based on misguided assumptions.

A second consequence is "impression management," the process of trying to control the impressions of others. A result of this is ineffective behaviors such as social conformity (agreeing to an agenda without the facts to avoid upsetting another party) can develop. This can be a problem when decisions are not in the long-term interest of an organization.

To better manage office politics:

- Be aware of dominant political themes.
- Avoid making decisions without having all the facts.
- Observe how your team copes and behaves in response to different political themes
- Know your personal values and ethics; never compromise them.
- Work with your team to align its goals with the organization's.
- Network and learn the different individual and organizational drivers that influence decision making.

To successfully manage office politics over the long term it's necessary to take proactive steps to manage political agendas. Don't ignore them.

