

# Organizations as political systems

[Business](#), [Leadership](#)



## 1. Introduction

Maxwell, J. once said “ leaders must be close enough to relate to others, but far enough ahead to motivate them.” (ThinkExist. com, 2006) This shows that managing relationships in an organization is not an easy job for leaders. Leaders always have to balance relationships. To obtain the power needed for the position and for achieving the planned goals, leaders should understand the political game and enter it wisely to increase their power base and influence their followers or even stakeholders.

This paper gives an assessment of the practicality of Dr. Kenney’s advices that came in her article “ new rules of leadership and organizational politics”. This article could be a living example for how leaders could manage the power in their organization by managing relationships within this organization. After assessing each advice, the paper gives a conclusion.

## 2. Assessment of the Practicality of Dr. Kennedy’s Advices

Kennedy (1998) in her article provided seven advices or prescriptions for leaders to follow to succeed in the political game within the organization. She focused on the relationship between executives and younger workers. The article showed how leaders could manage relationships, how the leader’s behavior could soften the tone of the political climate in the organization and balance or unbalance the situation.

### Leadership not management

In this advice, Kennedy mentioned how young workers usually want to be treated by their managers or leaders. She showed how important for any leader to have the vision and to be able to set strategic goals. That’s

because there is a big difference between being a boss who does things right and being a real leader who do the right things. In another word, employees need a leader who leads them and shows them the way.

She also stressed on the importance of “ style adaptation” whether the leader likes it or not. Concerning the employees’ need “ to be taught not directed” (Kennedy, 1998), this could be due to the fact that (1) she is talking about young employees with whom ‘ authoritarian leadership style’ could be the appropriate style or due to (2) the increased awareness of ‘ career development/path’ among employees that made employees fight for more power right from the start. This makes the process of increasing power and influence a necessity for leaders to control and contain the hidden war.

She also mentioned some consequences of ‘ mismanagement’ when a leader is “ arbitrary, underskilled, capricious, or judgmental” (Kennedy, 1998). And ‘ direct negative reports’ come on top of these consequences followed by accusations of mismanagement or accusations of forcing employees to quit the job.

Inclusion with a vengeance

Customizing the way employees participate in meetings by “ using different styles -one-on-one versus group” (Kennedy, 1998) - is an appropriate mechanism to make sure they will participate, especially the youngest in this case. But to stand helplessly and say “ they won’t participate” reflects a ‘ negative attitude’ and will spread it over till it makes the others -who usually participate- stop to do.

Kennedy (1998) showed in this advice that 'sharing information and ideas' is crucial for leaders to make a successful team. Acquiring these information and ideas from followers will empower the leader to recognize and contain any problems, get over negativity in the workplace and to create a channel where he/she can influence their followers more.

Two important things mentioned by Kennedy (1998), (1) the leader needs some skills like "cajolery into verbal contribution" to obtain these information and ideas, and (2) any successful leader should not ignore what retention studies (and other HR studies) do say.

Modesty and consideration and demand both

She mentioned the bad consequences of some behaviors such as arrogance, hypocrisy, and wasting money. And because consequences could be severe, leaders should watch their behavior and try to have a positive approach. Being modest and considerate with their followers will enable leaders to get the best out of them, especially, when results showed that there "is evidence that considerate leaders are higher performers and more satisfied with their jobs" (Schriesheim, 1982 cited in Clark, D., 1997).

Act on rumor, don't await confirmation

Acting before rumors became actions could be a mechanism for avoiding any future escalations and reflects the leader wisdom in problem solving. This could be achieved by (1) being close enough to followers to see any signs for complaints or even by (2) creating a feedback, reporting or even intelligence system.

Aggressively collect allies

This means that the bigger the network of allies, the more power the leader could have and the safer and securer he/she is. Allies give more power and could rebalance the situation by giving their support in making required decisions or approving them even if they are enemies or even young employees. This is what Pfeffer (Hodge, J., 1992) called "increasing the power base" which should be one of any leader's tasks.

Understand the politics of voice mail

Kennedy mentioned the 'voice mail' technology as a helpful political tool for leaders or managers. However, nowadays, technology can support leaders' communication with a lot of new tools -not only voice mail- for both synchronous and asynchronous communication.

The fact that a leader depends on using this tool to guarantee the answer, - somehow- reflects a 'negative attitude'. For some jobs, a whole day could cause a real disaster. Using this technology as a political tool could be insufficient or ineffective for a lot of jobs. Right now there are many enterprise technological solutions that guarantee creating a powerful communication channels between everyone in the organization.

Position power isn't personal power

In this advice, Kennedy assures the fact that personal power of leaders isn't enough to influence his/her followers. "Followers won't simply accept any one to lead them just because he/she is better than them" (Kennedy, 1998). In another word, to be efficient is not enough; the leader should effectively know how to influence his/her followers.

3. Conclusion

<https://assignbuster.com/organizations-as-political-systems/>

Based on the assessment of Dr. Kennedy's advices, there are some overall thoughts or main conclusions concerning the leaders' role in the management of power within an organization.

- Increasing the power base: it is a necessity for leaders to increase their power base to influence their followers, contain any conflicts or problem even before it start. In another word, personal power is not enough for a leader and being efficient is not enough to influence employees/followers. They simply won't absorb the idea of obeying the leader only because he/she is better than them. For them, " this is not a good reason to be promoted" (Kennedy, 1998).

Collecting allies is a necessity for leaders to support their decisions or approve them to achieve the required goals. This is " the number one guarantee to have a secure job or position" (Kennedy, 1998). There is another source for power which is " acquiring information and ideas and not to let employees " withhold them" (Kennedy, 1998).

- Style adaptation: it is a necessity for leaders to adapt their styles to succeed in managing their followers according to different situations or tasks, " taking into consideration different forces that influence the leader's style (such as available time, type of relationships, who has the information, type of the task...)" (Clark, 1997).

- Being close to followers: " leaders should be close enough to their followers to relate to them" (Maxwell, J. cited in ThinkExist. com, 2006) in order to be able to take action before any rumor -or even signs of complaint- turns to be real problems.

- The positive (attitude or approach): it is the best way to get better results or performance and to avoid any bad consequences such as negativity, stress, depression, conflict in the workplace. In another word, bossing everyone around or mismanaging them will at least “ cause a negative feedback in direct reports” (Kennedy, 1998).

For example, a mechanism such as “ using different styles for meetings could motivate employees and increase the participation” (Kennedy, 1998) and is better than stand helplessly and accept the fact that they won't participate.

Also, being considerate and modest leader makes the leader enhance the performance and avoid a lot of bad consequences mentioned above, especially if “ studies showed the positive relationship between such behaviors and high performance and job satisfaction” (Schriesheim, 1982 cited in Clark, D., 1997).

- Self development: it is necessary for leaders to continuously develop themselves -for example- by reading studies in management in general or in the HRD field in specific to acquire more knowledge, learn more skills and have an idea about the best practices in the field. This will enhance the overall performance and effectiveness.

An example skill mentioned by Kennedy (1998), the “ cajolery into verbal contribution” (Kennedy, 1998) during meetings which makes it easy for leaders to acquire information and ideas from the team by which they will be more empowered.

- The power of IT: for example, IT could provide leaders with creative tools or solutions for communication (synchronous or asynchronous) that could help to empower them more.
- The raw model management: above all mentioned above, leaders should be raw models -with their behaviors and values- for their followers and watch carefully their behavior to motivate, inspire, influence them and avoid any complaints, resistance or even depression.

Finally, it is important to realize that “ leadership is a mix of knowledge, values, skills, and behaviors” (DeKlein, K. & Penstone, M., 1994) and being political is just one side of it to increase the power base of the leader to support decisions and influence followers or even stakeholders to achieve the planned goals. “ Achieving corporate balance is a critical responsibility of leadership” (Boyar, 2008) and it is achieved with “ the reconciliation between personal commitment and work” (Boyar, 2008). This reconciliation is the only way to create a fair balance that makes everyone motivated and satisfied.