Power ,politics and conflict

POWER POLITICS AND CONFLICTS : CONTROVERSIAL OR OVERHYPED?

The words power , politics and conflict are enough to arouse controversial topics into discussion. There is a saying that " No science is immune to the infection of politics and corruption of power"(Jacob Bronowski, n. d). Conflicts are the rivalries or the internal competitions in an organization.

Power and politics are the two sides of the same coin and one cannot exist without the other. Power concerns the capacity of an individual to exert their power over others whereas politics are the techniques used to influence others unknowingly(Rollinson, 2008). Since both politics and power are concerned with forcibly taking power conflicts are bound to develop.

So what are then the implications of power , politics and conflicts ? There are four highly significant implications given by Rollinson; 2008, as follows: Firstly power exists in all the organizations , so instead of trying to eradicate power or try finding solutions for it people should learn to accept it. Secondly power is not always obvious. Because power is very tempting people tend to be attracted towards it and people at higher posts generally managers tend to exploit their position in an organization. Thirdly, political tactics always involve a risk . He/she should be careful enough that people do not come to know their vested interests. Lastly conflicts in majority of organizations are

unavoidable. In most of the cases though conflicts are self stimulating and can increase like parasitic growth.

POWER

It is a known fact that power exists everywhere. The history of organization will be incomplete without the mention of power. Power can be defined in many ways . The one thing we all know about power is that power is an attribute and can be defined in the following way " Power is the ability of a person or group to influence over others to have their desires fulfilled without having to compromise on them"(Tawney cited in Rollinson, 2008). Rollinson , 2008: p stated that there are many implications to power ie power cannot exist in isolation, and has to exist between two people or a group. Power needs an reason to exist. Power is entirely situational and benefits people who take the advantage of power at the right time. Many feel they do not possess power but when they look closely power does exist with them in one form or other. For a long time authors have tried to use power and authority in the same context but they were highly mistaken. There exists a huge difference between power and authority. Power is a separate entity in itself whereas authority is a type of power. Authority can be used by people to exercise power in some

situations but can be challenged if it exceeds its limits. Power can never be challenged. Authority is the most visible forms of power in an organization.

BASES OF POWER

Power typically has two bases interpersonal base and a contextual base. In the interpersonal level power can be exercised personally by one individual over others. Interpersonal power can be categorised into five types reward power, coercive power , legitimate power , referent power and lastly expert power. The referent power and expert power fall under the sub-topic of the

personal origins whereas the first three fall under the sub-topic of organisational power. Contextual power on the other hand is of seven types organisational culture, knowledge and information , external environment, resources, networks , organisational structure, and finally decision making(Rollinson, 2008; p). As mentioned above we all are under the impression that power has two bases. But the truth differs as the difference between the two bases does not really exist and is on a superficial level(rollinson, 2008; p). In real life both are equally used and are strongly connected. Power can be a highly misunderstood topic and will remain incomplete without the inclusions of some of its misconceptions.

MISCONCEPTIONS OF POWER

One of the major misconception of power is that power can only exist with people with a higher position in an organization. It is a true to a certain extent but not necessarily all the time. Power can be and is misused by people in the downward level mainly managers and their subordinates. There are many instances in the interpersonal base of power where power is misused by them. For example expert power can sometimes make a manager dependant on his/her subordinates whose cooperation is vital. The second misconception is

that power is a visible attribute . Power is visible but the invisible power has more power and is more potent(Rolinson, 2008). Consider a case study where power is highly misused due to position and decisions getting manipulated by that.

CASE STUDY

This article describes about the dark side of ownership and corruption that comes along with the high position(Osborne , 1994: 24). In this article the author focuses on power and how it can be misused by people according to their positional value. This is a case about a regional electrical contracting company that was running successfully for twenty five years and was founded by two business partners. The author mentions how the companys scenario changes when one of the business partner's son joins the company. The son ideally spends the initial months training and observing all the staff. He also patiently listens to all his subordinates. But the moment he gets holds of the fifty percent partnership with his father he decides to expand his hold over the company . This is proved by the fact that three out of five key holder resign within 18 months of his reign. The company suffers a lot of loses and finally is on the verge of bankruptcy. This article is a perfect example of misuse of

legitimate power. This article proves that power can be highly misused at any positions. Power has been described as the available force or potential for achieving desired outcomes.

POLITICS

" Real politics is the possession and distribution of power".(Benjamin Disraeli, n. d). Politics is the use of power to influence decisions in order to achieve those outcomes (Pfeffer, 1981 cited in Rollinson, 2008). As mentioned earlier power and politics are two sides of same coin poilitics like power cannot be measured. Politics is one of the invisible attributes of power . It exists in every organization , most of the managers have a negative view

towards politics(Daft, 2007). The common misconception is that like power, politics too are carried out by top-level officers of an organization. Politics is not always an open do for problems but, some conflicts can also be resolved with the help of politics. Politics is the process of bargaining and negotiating that is used to overcome conflicts and differences of opinion(). In an organization oraganizational politics exist and can defined as politics that are used to achieve power and outcomes as desired(). The most frequent question is weather poilitics is rational or political? We can diffrentaite between rational model of politics and political model as follows:

RATIONAL VS THE POLITICAL MODEL

Joseph and Pfeffer (1989: 108-8, 1981: 31) explain that: According to the rationalist model the goals of an organization are coherent. In a political model goals can get distorted as leadership is given most importance over profitability. In this model individual interests are more important . Let us look at the table below which explains the rational model and the political model in detail.

The sober approach of the rational model led many to challenge it. Many examples led to the promotion of the political model. Now we know for sure political behaviour exists in every organization.

POLITICAL CATEGORIES

So what are the factors leading to political behaviour and why does it exist in an organization?(Chanlat, 1997 cited in Daft, 2007) distinguished political behaviour in three categories. Namely personal , decisional, structural characteristics. While recruiting individuals for a company jobs, the recruiters always take into account the individual qualities and his passion related to

the use of power and political behaviour. Thus the selection process itself gives rise to political behaviour. The Personal charcacteristics are of two types. One important type of personal characteristic is Machiavellianism. This is the ability of people to engage in political behaviour and make use of power. Machiavelli was a sixteenth century Florentine philosopher. He developed a set of guidelines for rulers to secure and hold governmental power. He suggested that the most simplest method of obtaining power is by manipulating others. His followers mainly liked to manipulate people , would say what others wanted to hear. They also believed that it was wrong to trust someone completely in an organization. He believed in the fact of hiding the facts until compelled to reveal.

The second characteristic of political behaviour are decisional characteristics. There are of two types structured and unstructured. Structured can be solved using decision rules. Unstructured more common cannot be solved using decision rules. Political behaviour is most likely to occur in the unstructured decisions. The unstructured decision does not follow any rules and thus all the rules used by the mangers are self made. The managers make sure that they use every tactic wisely by carefully deflecting the resistance of others , winning peoples support etc. The third characteristic is the structured characteristics. In organizations we see that all the work assigned is different to everyone. This is where the term differentiation comes into the picture. This leads to the differences of goals between an organization it also leads to the difference of information obtained by each department. In this the people in the organization may agree towards achieving the same goal but differences can occur in their ways to approach

those goals. The combined effect of all these factors leads to the developments of conflicts within an organization. Political behaviour thus is unavoidable in structured characteristic.

POLITICAL TACTICS TO USE POWER

To make use of political tactics to gain power can have many ways, one political tactic that can be used is to assign loyal people at top positions. This can be used so that the top level executive does not lose his position. A top level exexcutive should always hire people who would believe his views. Political power can reduce someone explicitly claims it. Political power is best to be invisible.

CONFLICT

The word conflict can evoke a general idea about its meaning. Conflict can exist everywhere, be it interpersonal relationships, in organisations be it in interpersonal relationships, in organizations between two countries etc. Our major focus here is to study conflicts in organization. So how do we define conflict? " Conflict is the behaviour of an individual or group that purposely sets out to block or inhibit another group (or individual) from achieving its goals."(Rollinson, 414). Conflict and competition go hand in hand . To have competition with someone is when both are working towards the same goal and to have conflicts is when one purposely blocks the other from achieving that goal.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS OF CONFLICTS

Like every other attribute conflict has its own pros and cons. As mentioned earlier conflict exists everywhere, so conflict cannot be avoided and has to be managed or resolved.

WEAKNESS OF CONFLICTS

People generally try to avoid conflict as they see conflict as something unhealthy in an organization. Conflict can lower morale and constrict communication. Low morale leads to poor performance and directly affects companies business. Conflict can restrict the information flow between members of an organization.(Milcovich , 2005).

STRENGTHS OF CONFLICTS

Conflict can prove to be a boon for many organizations if it is taken in the right manner. Conflict can develop managerial skills and knowledge. Good conflict helps people to grow and solve problems more effectively. Good conflict can also stimulate creativity and problem solving .(Bacal, 2004).

TYPES OF CONFLICT

There are four major types frames of reference on conflict. They are labelled as unitarist, pluralist, radical and interactionis.(Fox , 1996; 1973). The unitarist the idea behind this frame of reference is that every organization isnpeaceful and the occurrence of conflict can distort the organizational goals. The pluralist frame of reference views the organization as a collection of groups and so the occurrence of conflict is considered to be normal. The interactionist frame of reference considers conflict to be performance booster for an organization. Finally the radical frame of reference views conflict to be inevitable outcome of capitalism.(Fox , 1996; 1973).

EFFECTS

Conflicts can have adverse effects on an organization. It can lead to unhealthy working atmosphere in the organization. The organization may suffer business losses due to its co-workers being on a strike. We can

consider an example of Preston Mill workers strike (Literary Encyclopedia ; published 25 Jan 2008)

It is a Lancashire cotton mill , where many people were provided employement. In the year 1847 a huge financial crisis was observed . This crisis affected the salary of all the workers and there was a 10% pay cut. The owners of the company promised restoration of the salary after the condition improved. As years went by there was no sign of the workers restoration of salary. The workers decided to go on a strike and conflict occurred between the workers and owners in 1853. Mills were shut this resulted in the loss of jobs for about 20000 workers. This conflict went on for a year was finally managed after the workers decided to meet the workers demands. So in this case the conflict was managed and could not be resolved.

CONFLICTS: SOLUTION OR END OF PATH

Conflicts can be managed or resolved. There are two types of solutions to conflicts one is when conflicts can be resolved and second when conflicts can be managed. ()If we consider an example of University which itself is an organization we see conflicts between the students and staff members. We also observe internal conflicts between students and staff members among themselves. Let us consider a scenario where the students are asking for extension in their assignment deadlines if the respective professor does not oblige there will be a conflict between the students and the professor. A simple solution for this problem is that the professor extends the due date and the matter is resolved but in case he/she doesn't then the conflict cannot be managed. Now there are cases where conflicts cannot be resolved but can be managed. If we take up a big organization internal conflicts are

bound to occur between the members of the organization for any reason be it someones expertise or knowledge , position and so on. In this case conflicts cannot be resolved as this is a internal matter and all do not know about it so in this case conflicts need to be managed as all know they ought to work together as neither want to lose their jobs due to their conflicts.

GENDER THEORIES
BATTLE OF THE SEXES: THING OF PAST OR PRESENT ?

The battle between men and women in an organization have been existing for ages now. Even today when so many women are termed as working women they are still said to be working in a " mans world". There have been issues between the two sexes regarding pay, their position etc. Although technology and globalization is on the rise there is no sign of changes in behaviour towards women in organizations. Recent studies have shown that even though women are successful and growing in their respective profession it cannot still be compared to their male counterparts.(Boyle and Barr, 2001; Elston , 1993; Evetts, 1996; Gjerberg 2001; Greed , 2000; Riska 2001; Williams 1999). Besides the changes in organizational structure, the internal working of an organization has still remained traditional and reflects traditional hierarchy(Kuhlman, 2003). We can observe the difference between the two sexes more clearly by the example of the glass ceiling effect.

THE GLASS CIELING EFFECT

The term " glass ceiling" was first used to refer to the invisible barriers that women came across in their career progression.(Hymowitz and Shellhardt, 1986).

EFFECTS

The women always got less pay as compared to males . There existed a huge gap between the positions , job titles in men and women. Inspite of having more experience, expertise and skills women were given inferior jobs. The United States census bureau statistics showed that every women earns about 75. 3 cents to 1$ per male. Studies revealed that customers preferred male customers rather than female (Heckman , 2009). Further shocking studies revealed that female customers too preferred male customers. This led to the organizations to be more stereotyped. The possibilities of females getting promotions were remote. Women were only restricted to a particular field of their organization. Womens skills were often viewed as luck rather than giving them credit for their expertise.(Lyness and Thompson, 1997). To prove the theory of the glass ceiling effect let us consider a case study which shows the existence of gender pay gap in developing countries (Jamali, Sidani and Kobeissi , 2008).

CASE STUDIES

Women have made significant impact in organizations in terms of labour management , educational qualification , expertise in their own fields etc. But we observe that the graph of womens achievements are not levelled up against their employment conditions. Women do not receive fair and equal pay. This theory proves that glass ceiling effect still exists. The main purpose of this article is to examine the difference in wages between the two counterparts. The main problem area is that unfair treatment is given to females in organizations , they are given less wages. Females also do not receive proper benefits . Females receive less promotions. It is often seen that when a male and female joins a particular company they get equal pay

but as the seniority increases the pay value decreases for females even though both have the same seniority.

SOLUTION

To solve this never ending issue organizations should create awareness about this issue. The first step towards this to stop prejudice against female workers. Members of an organization should be given training to resolve this issue. Strignent laws should be made against organizations inducting in unfair treatment toward females. The result for this will be a fair and a just working atmosphere for working women.

CONCLUSION

To sum up the above explaination we can notice that the core of an organization is formed by the help of organizational power, politics and conflicts. These can help the organization in a way or destroy it in another way. As we say you can run but you cant hide the same can be said about organizational politics , power and conflicts that you can avoid it but cannot ignore it, it exists in an organization in one way or another.

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