

Organizational behaviour: power and conflict



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Power, conflict and politics in organization

Introduction

Beneath the global financial crisis and credit crunch, many companies cannot overcome their own problems so that leads to shut their business down. Due to this situation, in order to survive in the organizations, it's essential for managers to have self improvement in various fields and strengthen their abilities such as the ability of controlling and using power and politics to manage and settle conflicts in their working environment. In pursuit of achieving goals, people need to deal with the interpersonal and intergroup conflict or problems caused by different backgrounds, cultures and education so that they can get more power which they are longing to attain. It is necessary to realize how conflict and politics influence one's life working in an organization. Additionally, having a clear understanding of the relationships between power, conflict and politics within organization can contribute to comprehend what roles they are in organization. This paper gives an account of power, conflict and politics in organizational activity and has been organized in the following way. Foremost, the first part will demonstrate the definition of conflict and give a detailed description on the sources of conflict. It will then go on to illustrate power and politics in the following parts. Finally, it will critically assess some of the effects of power and politics on life within organization.

Conflict

- Definition of conflict

Conflict is not avoidable and can be managed and reduced by exercising power and political strategies. Cole has defined that ' conflict is not

necessarily a bad thing, for it can force members of a group to recognize the deep feelings of one individual, or of a minority and make efforts to resolve the issue which appears to be divisive' (1995: 186). Besides, Daft agrees that ' conflict is a natural and inevitable outcome of the close interaction of people who may have diverse opinions and values, pursue different objectives, and have differential access to information and resources within the organization' (2007: 360).

Dating back to Karl Marx's theory which indicated that ' conflict keeps society in a state of potentially continuous transformation' (Hatch, 2006: 251), theorist who are major in the field of power suppose conflict as the basis of organizing instead of cooperation.

- Sources of Conflict

It is common that individuals and groups often have diverse aims and interests that they desire to attain. Conflict shows up throughout the interaction among these varying interests. In organizations, it is harmful to have too much conflict. However, conflict can have positive effects on the organization itself by means of questioning the intrinsic and original ideas and thinking models, encouraging new thoughts and approaches, and bringing out changes.

Owing to the contribution of the studies of intergroup conflict by those theorists like Rahim(1985) and Thomas(1976), Daft has summed up as ' behaviour that occurs among organizational groups when participants identify with one group and perceive that other groups may block their group's goal achievement or expectation' (2007: 361). Accordingly, it is

defined that there are four sources of intergroup conflict – goal incompatibility differentiation, task interdependence and limited resources. Nevertheless, Hatch (2006) had a more detailed overview of sources of conflict by using the study of organization theorists Richard Walton and John Dutton. By looking through the framework below, it is helpful to forecast and understand conflict, evaluate the possible sources of organization conflict within a specific and given situation. The list shows us that within different contexts, different sources of conflict can be developed and transform to different problems. With this table, managers can cope with those problems in right ways by aiming at particular ‘ local conditions’ of conflict (Walton and Dutton, 1969) (cited in Hatch, 2006: 281). In the following part, it will briefly talk about some of the sources of conflict in organization.

Goal incompatibility

As goal represents the aim or object which an endeavour is directed, it can be varied by different personal interest, values and pursuits. ‘ Goal incompatibility is likely to be the greatest cause of intergroup conflict in organizations’ (Daft, 2007: 362) The goals of different groups or departments represent the precise the purposes that those members are working hard to gain. Gaining the goals of one group or department usually disturbs the ones of other groups or departments. For example, ‘ departments of manufacturing and marketing have different perspectives on achieving their goals’ (Daft, 2007: 362). To manufacturing department, production needs cost control which can help to raise the prices of products. At the same time, marketing department endeavours to make the products meet the customers’ needs for variety. Meanwhile, by the way of producing diversified

products, manufacturing need to broaden the product lines which will cause problems like high production costs and low quality. By contrast, marketing are likely to concern on whether they can sell the products in better quality with lower price. Goals like high production cost, quality of product, price, and new products become the conflict between these two departments.

Differentiation

Daft (2007) has introduced differentiation as ' the differences in cognitive and emotional orientations among managers in different functional departments' (Daft, 2007: 363). ' Within the divisions of organization or departments, the diversities of subculture which can be referred to values, attitudes and standards of behaviour can result in conflict' (Daft, 2007: 363). In addition, each department or group has its own working patterns, approaches to resolve problems, goals and perspectives. Take the example of working separately with groups of German and Chinese by personal researches and experience. During the cooperation with German, they are well-prepared in advance and will make decisions as possible as they can in the meeting by themselves in order to solve the problems and finish the work efficiently; also, they are more independent and well-organized and do everything carefully without involving personal emotions into their work. By contrast, when working with Chinese, they are more likely to work in teams and follow the decisions and direction made by the leader after a few discussions; they are keen on building up a harmonious environment as well. Consequently, conflict between German and Chinese emerges on the basis of different ways of working mode.

Task interdependence

' Task interdependence can be divided by at least three forms that each of them refers to different sorts of conflict' (Hatch, 2006: 283). Pooled task interdependence requires little interaction which means that this kind of task can be mostly finished independently; sequential task interdependence means when one department finish, they will give the results to the next department; and reciprocal task interdependence implies that interaction and information and materials exchange always appear among the departments. For example, like the police station, the reception staffs can deal with many of the cases themselves. When some fatal cases happen, Criminal Intelligence Bureau (CIB) will search for the information of suspicious criminals and then pass the information to Regional Crime Unit (RCU) so that they can take action. However, when the staffs of CIB are off, it is difficult for staffs of RCU to get more relative materials and information. As to this, conflict reveals between these two departments and may have effects on the relationship between them. (NEEDS REFERENCE)

Common resources

Conflict is usually aroused as a result of relying on general lacking resources. ' The familiar resources in an organization can refer to shared equipment (like scanners, internal interconnected systems and terminals) and centralized services for staff (such as computers, technical support and so on)' (Hatch, 2006: 284). In most of the organizations, resources can be the symbol of power and influence. The higher power the managers have, the more opportunities strive for scarce resources those departments have. In such consequences, conflict conceal in the pressure to compete for those rare resources.

<https://assignbuster.com/organizational-behaviour-power-and-conflict/>

Communication obstacles

Communication is one of the significant ways to exchange ideas and cooperate with others. As Stella said ' language and verbal communication can easily create misunderstandings, it also fortunately can clarify misunderstandings' (1999: 85), When groups have diverse languages or nationalities, it is not easy to have the same views or agreements on the common concern. An example from personal experience is that in the UK Universities, some of the international students may not have the background knowledge of their courses. When they are having lectures, they may not easily understand what the lecturers talk about due to the specific terms of those courses or the accents. Additionally, different levels of the cognition of English also lead the international students to have different levels of understanding of the course. Therefore, when those international students ask some questions such as for understanding the basic knowledge, the lecturers may not directly answer them. Instead, they will suggest those students to read more extra reading so as to get a better understanding. Resulting from this, students may feel helpless and marginalized that their problems are not resolved and their enthusiasm may be led to decline. Thus, conflict between lecturers and international students comes out and provokes the dissatisfaction towards the course.

Power and Politics

Definition of Power

According to Dahl's (1957) definition of power, Hatch(2006) has indicated that in spite of levels of individuals, groups or organizations, power can refer to be wielded between people with interrelationships. Additionally, Daft <https://assignbuster.com/organizational-behaviour-power-and-conflict/>

(2007) has concluded from different views of power and summarized them as the ability of people or groups within an organization which can help people to carry out the results they want via affecting others. In other word, by using power, the power holders will impede others' process of achieving goals with the purposes of attaining their desired outcomes.

Power vs. Authority

Power has a lot of different sources. As it is derived from power, authority is to help members to have success in acquiring the results they want; alternatively, it is special because it has a connection with hierarchy, which represents the social structure within organization. In other words, the authority of different members depends on their positions of structure in hierarchy. ' The three characteristics of authority can be recognized as: given to the positions in organization, accepted by subordinates and lowered in the vertical hierarchy' (Daft, 2007: 367-368). Varied authority is vested in individuals relying on their positions in organization; besides, supervisors are supposed to have legal rights to use their authority and let their subordinates follow the patterns they set. Moreover, authority is divided by the hierarchy of organizational structure vertically, which means people at the top have more authority than those work at the bottom; and the range of authority decreases level by level in the hierarchy.

Tactics for increasing power

As managers in an organization, the abilities to influence the consequences measure by their position and responsibility. So as to get and increase the power managers have, they will find out favourable tactics to make success to their aims. Furthermore, for making the processes more efficient,

managers usually will adopt many different means to create the opportunity for cooperation and collaboration to decline negative conflict. Daft (2007) offers four strategies to enhance power: 'enter areas of high uncertainty', 'create dependencies', 'provide scarce resources' and 'satisfy strategic contingencies'. If the departments have the ability to effectively decrease uncertainty, bring in more dependency, earn more limited resources and deal with strategic contingencies, there will have an increase in the power for those departments.

Politics

As it is similar to power, politics is imponderable and hard to estimate. Daft (2007) illustrates that 'politics is the use of power to influence decisions in order to achieve those outcomes'. That is to say, in organizations, people can achieve what they want or their desired results by utilizing their power to affect the processes of decision making.

Meanwhile, it can be found that Hatch (2006) has the same cognition as Daft supporting by Pfeffer(1981), who has described politics as 'Organizational politics involves those activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or dissensus about choices' (1981b: 7). Also, politics is not necessarily a negative force but also can be recognized as positive within organization. As conflict and uncertainty are inherent and unavoidable, politics plays a role as the approach that offers opportunities for people who participate in to come to agreements and make decisions; or otherwise it may get into troubles or unsolvable. In

organizations, sometimes a lot of decisions are made via political process instead of rational decision process. With the intention of achieving for the results they want, managers will apply political strategies like establish coalition, enlarge networks, manage the boundaries of decisions, strengthen legitimacy and professional knowledge and skills and make direct appeals to make progresses.

The effects of politics in organizational life

By making use of power and influence, politics has led to be identifies as ' self-serving' or ' a natural organizational decision process' (Daft, 2007: 377). For self-serving side, it shows that politics relates to the unapproved activities in organization. Apart from this, in the working environment, politics also refers to individuals behave dishonest and tricky for the aims of their self-interest which will break the harmony and create conflict. People who detect this sort of political actions in their companies or organizations will feel anxious and dissatisfy with their jobs. Besides, exercise politics in appropriate ways can heighten the spirit of personnel, improve the quality in work performance and decision making process.

In addition, Robert and Paul introduced that ' politics influences salary attainment and progression in organizations' (1989: 153). Differing from gender, Dreher, Dougherty and Whitely (1988) reported that ' influence tactics interpreted the important ratio of the differences in salaries for both males and females' (cited in Robert and Paul, 1989). Overall, politics can be either positive or negative. (NEED TO CHANGE THE CONTENTS)

The effects of conflict in organizational life

Conflict does not frequently come out with negative results; contrarily, it gives positive effect within the organizations as well. As it is mentioned before, Cole (1995) introduces conflict that conflict is not essentially negative; it can push group members to realize the feelings of some of the members or one particular, and exert themselves to resolve the problems. Managers who can manage and cope with conflict well can bring positive effects to their process of goal achievement. In organizations, conflict can have positive effects on renewal in relationships, chances for newer possibilities and increase in productivity. For example, manufacturing have conflicts with marketing caused by goal incompatibility. However, manufacturing can have a deeper and clearer understanding of the needs and wants of consumer throughout the demands of marketing require. Once the negative conflicts are resolved or get a balance via negotiation, the effects of conflict will turn to positive and become a motivation of two departments by creating a renewal relationship. By contrast, the negative effects of conflict can be acknowledged by increase in stress of individuals, reduction in production, worsening relationships and cooperation and enhancing possibilities of violent conflict. It can be found in some bureaucratic organizations, when conflict occur between managers and subordinates, the increase in stress and decrease in motivation of subordinates will result in low efficiency of their work and worsening cooperation. Managers will use their power to restrict and frustrate the subordinates in order to let them obey their orders which will gradually transform to violence in conflict.

Conclusion

This paper has given an account of what roles conflict, power and politics play in organizations and how do they affect people's activities within organizations. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the use of power, the characters of conflict and how decrease and manage conflict among groups and in individuals with the ways of politics in organizational activities and critically estimate some of the impacts of politics and conflict during the organizational life. In handling interpersonal or intergroup conflicts, managers need to classify the sources of conflict and adopt the right ways to resolve them or try to turn them into positive ways. Alternatively, managers should develop the abilities to make good use of the positive effects of power and politics in working environment in order to raise the efficiency to achieve the desired outcomes. Due to that, managers can get more power, networks and higher position within the organization with the aim of surviving in the competition.

Reference

Daft, R., 2001, Organization Theory and Design USA: Thomson

Daft, R., 2007, Understanding the Theory and Design of Organizations USA: Thomson

Cole, G. A. 1995, Organisational Behaviour: Theory and Practice London: DP Publications Ltd

Hatch, M. J., 2006, Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives New York: Oxford University Press

Robert. G. A., and Paul, R., 1989, *Impression Management in the Organization* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Stella, T. 1999, *Communicating Across Cultures*.

New York: The Guilford Press
Walton, R. E., and Dutton, J. M., 1969, The management of interdepartmental conflict. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 14: 73-84.