

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Authority is institutional and hence, legitimate. One can look up the organisation chart and notice the existence, in most cases, of authority relationships of different individuals in the organisation. The organisation also attempts to provide status symbol to a position-holder in accordance with his positional level and its requirements. Authority increases as one goes up the organisational pyramid or hierarchical ladder. Most people confuse this increase in authority with the growing power of an office-holder.

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Generally, authority and power are taken to be synonymous, but modern management literature distinguishes one from the other. The reason is not far to seek. On many occasions, many people who have no authority in a particular matter have been found influencing decisions regarding it. Similarly, some of those who are authorised to take decisions prove incompetent on some account or the other. An important factor responsible for all this may be organisational politics that most people associate with legislative assemblies, but modern management literature regards it as the characteristics of every organization regardless of the size, function or character of ownership. Bitter struggles among individuals, groups and organisations are, in modern times, a common-day occurrence everywhere. These contests are fought at every level in the hierarchy. Politics is, therefore, a process whereby power is acquired, transferred and exercised upon others to influence their behaviours. Hence, power is personal, political and acquired by individuals. Authority could, at best, be regarded as institutionalised power. Authority is narrower in scope than power and applies to fewer behaviours in an organisation. This makes it necessary that a clear distinction between authority and power be drawn. This also highlights its critical importance in the organization, though people tend to avoid a discussion on it.

12.2 POWER: MEANING AND SOURCES

The meaning of the term authority is different from that of power. Power is, in fact, one's ability to influence others' behaviours. That is, it is one's influence potential. Through the use of power, people influence decision-making. This influence may affect resource allocations, goal setting, hiring decisions, or many other outcomes and

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According to Wolfe, power is, therefore, the potential ability of one person to induce forces on another person towards movement or change in a given direction, within a given behaviour region, at a given time.

The power is shown when an individual includes forces on another to mould his behaviour according to his own choice. What it implies is that power has to be understood as an ongoing process. That is, there is no evidence of power unless it is exercised—evidence in the sense that it is not formalised. Many a time, however, people voluntarily behave in accordance with the well-known choice of a powerful person for the fact of his being powerful. Thus, power may not actually have to be used. Hence, power operates consciously and unconsciously, directly and indirectly. It should also be remembered here why a person allows himself/herself to be influenced. It seems perhaps so obvious that the determining factors would be the degree of dependency, uncertainty of the task that one performs, or one's personality characteristics like people who cannot tolerate ambiguity or are highly anxious, or have high needs for affiliation, are more susceptible to individual or group influence. This means that the influenceability of every individual in every situation is not the same. This brings home an important feature of power – that it is not a unilateral process of influence. Rather it involves a reciprocal relationship between the person who influences and the person being influenced.

Regarding power play in an organisation, we must realise that external environment casts serious influence on organisation which is constantly responding and adjusting to it. Thus, the expression of power is affected not only by internal organisational elements, but is also induced by external forces as organisations are open systems. The traditional view that organisations are antiseptically clean of influences from outside does not hold good. External interest units such as banks, financial institutions, insurance companies, governmental agencies, and so on, which come in contact with a business organisation, sustain it which means that they all have some power to influence decision-making. Look at Organisational Reality below.

Difference between Power and Authority

power and authority are so closely linked that both are used to denote the same meaning, at least in practical. However, there is a difference between two. In order to understand this difference let us first define power and identify its feature.

We can identify the features of authority which are as follows:

1. There is existence of right in authority. This right is given to the manager in an organisation by his superior. This right put a manager in a position by which he regulate the behaviour of a subordinate to act or not to act in certain ways.
2. The right of giving of order is legitimate. Unless there is an environment of legitimacy-meaning socially and ethically acceptable to all concerned authority cannot be meaningful and operational.
3. Authority gives right of decision making because a manager can give order only when he decide what is to be or not to be done by his subordinates. Authority is exercised by making decision and see that they are carried out.
4. The basic objective behind the use of authority is to influence the behaviour of the subordinate in terms of doing right things at right time so that organisational objectives are achieved. The use of authority may control the negative aspects of behaviour. This behaviour may be governed by persuasion, sanctions, influences the behaviour of other that might otherwise take place.
5. Authority is itself an objective thing but its exercise is always subjective. The use of authority is determined by the personality factors of its processes and the person or group of persons in those content this is made.

Power- based on the concept of power and authority to terms can now be differentiated. While authority is the right to command, power is the capacity to command. Additional concept of hierarchy find its essential rationale that some has the right to command someone else and that the subordinate person has the duty to obey the command. This is employed in the notion of official legitimacy, legal in nature rather than social and informal. However the

right to command does not necessarily strengthen the capacity to command. For example, a person in the society may have the capacity to influence the behaviour of others by his money power for muscle power but he may not have right to do so.

The major difference between authority and power can be identified as follows:

1. Authority is legitimized by certain rules, Regulation, laws and practices. In the case of power there may or may not be search legitimization.
2. Authority is institutional and originate because of structural relationship. Power emerges because of personal factors and varies with the individual. in the management of an organisation authority is the central element of formal organisation and systematic communication. Power reflect the political reality within the organisation and relates to more informal pattern of action and interaction that occur.
3. Authorities exist in the context of organisational relationship, mostly in superior subordinate relationship either direct or otherwise. Power relationship may exist between any two person and organisational relationship may not be necessary.



12.5 ORGANISATIONAL POLITICS

Politics is common in modern organisations. In the words of Pfiffner and Scherwood, “Politics is endemic to every organisation, regardless of size, function, or character or ownership. Furthermore, it is found in every level of the hierarchy; and it intensifies as the stakes become more important and the area of decision possibilities greater”. Organisational members resort to politics to gain more power, to have command over resources, to have more say in decision-making, to fulfil personal goals, etc.

What is organisational politics?

Politics relates to the way a person is able to get power over others and the way in which he uses power over others. In other words, it is the process whereby power is

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acquired and exercised upon others to influence their behaviour or to get things done. Thus, it is a method of operating in order to influence the behaviour of others.

According to Tushman, “Politics refers to the structure and process of the use of authority and power to affect definition of goals, direction and the other major parameters of the organisation. Decisions are not made in a rational way but rather through compromise, accommodation and bargaining.”

In the words of Farrell and Peterson, “Politics in an organisation refers to those activities that are not required as part of one’s formal role in the organisation, but that influence or attempt to influence the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organisation.”

Two key points emerge from above definitions: (i) Political behaviour is outside one’s specified job requirements, and (ii) it generates efforts to influence the goals, criteria, or processes used for decision-making that will result in the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organisation. Thus, political behaviour includes such activities as withholding key information from decision-makers, whistle blowing, spreading rumours, leading confidential information about organisational activities, entering into coalitions, exchanging favours for mutual benefits, lobbying on behalf of or against a particular individual or decision, “horse trading”, ingenious compromises, trade-offs and so on.

Features of organisational politics

The broad features of organisational politics are as under:

- (i) Politics involves the use of some kind of power or pressure over other persons or groups. Rewards and punishments are commonly used.
- (ii) Political behaviour is self-serving in nature. Attempts are made to use organisational resources for personal benefits or to give some benefits to others.

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(iii) Political behaviour is outside one's specified job requirements. It involves ways of getting things accomplished that are not formally recognised practices or procedures.

(iv) Political decisions may not be rational from the point of view of the organisation. They are usually taken to acquire more power.

Generally, people play politics either to serve their individual interests, or organisational interests, or both. It is, therefore, obvious that politics is not necessarily bad. It also follows from this that people resort to politics because there is some obstruction in fulfilling their goals. If resources were plentiful, and if there were no interdependence and people could have their own way, there would be no need to engage in politics. But this is not so and politics is a fact of life. Nord suggests four postulates of power in organisations that help focus on political realities: (a) organisations composed of coalitions competing with one another for resources; (b) each coalition seeking to protect its own interests; (c) unequal distribution of power; and (d) the exercise of power within organisations having impact on the exercise of power within the larger social system. Let us not, therefore, conjure up any bad feelings against politics. What is important is to understand its operation, what gives rise to it, and as a manager how we can turn it to organisational advantage.

Power and politics seem separable. Lasswell had called, as early as in 1936, politics as a problem of who gets what, when and how, implying the use of power for allocation of scarce resources. Pfeffer has also noted that if power is a force to influence events, politics involves those activities or behaviours through which power is developed and used in organisational settings. Power is a property of the system at rest; politics is the study of power in action. An individual, sub-unit or department may have power within an organisational context at some point of time; politics involves that exercise of power to get something accomplished, as well as those activities which are undertaken to expand the power base or the scope over which it can be exercised.

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