

# MAPPING THE POLITICAL TERRAIN AT UPS: AN ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

## Assignment Instructions:

Develop a fictional/or use a real organization and provide the following information:

## Introduction

Organizational politics plays a crucial role in shaping company dynamics and influencing decision-making processes. This analysis examines United Parcel Service (UPS), mapping its political terrain through the four metaphoric domains identified by Jarrett (2017): the weeds, the rocks, the high ground, and the woods. By analyzing these domains and creating representative fictional characters, we can better understand how organizational politics manifests within this global logistics giant.

## Company Overview

United Parcel Service (UPS) stands as one of the world's largest package delivery and supply chain solutions providers. Founded in 1907, UPS has grown into a global logistics powerhouse, offering services including package delivery, freight transportation, supply chain solutions, and specialized transportation services. The company employs approximately 500,000 workers worldwide across various roles, including package handlers, drivers, logistics coordinators, operations managers, and corporate executives. UPS operates globally, with presence in more than 220 countries and territories, maintaining its headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia (Wikipedia contributors, 2024).

1. Name the organization and identify the services or products it provides or manufactures.

**Organization Name:** United Parcel Service (UPS)

**Services/Products:** Package delivery, supply chain management, freight transportation

2. How many employees work at this organization and what are some of the roles within the company?

**Number of Employees:** Over 500,000

**Roles within UPS:** UPS, as a large global organization, offers a wide range of roles across different departments. Some of the key roles include:

- **Delivery Drivers:** Responsible for delivering packages to homes and businesses. This is one of the most visible roles at UPS, involving the efficient transportation of parcels.
- **Operations Manager:** Ensures that the logistics and supply chain processes run smoothly. This role involves overseeing warehouse operations, route planning, and employee coordination.
- **Package Handlers:** These employees work in the sorting facilities, managing the flow of parcels by loading and unloading trucks, as well as sorting packages based on their destinations.
- **Customer Service Representatives:** They handle customer inquiries, track shipments, and resolve any issues related to deliveries or services.
- **IT Specialists:** With a growing focus on technology, UPS employs IT professionals who maintain and develop systems that support tracking, logistics optimization, and data management.
- **Sales and Marketing Team:** These employees focus on acquiring new clients, maintaining relationships with existing customers, and promoting UPS services.

3. **Is this an international (global) company or does it only exist within one country?**

**International or Global Presence:** UPS is a global company, operating in more than 220 countries and territories around the world. With its headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, UPS has established an extensive international network to facilitate package delivery, supply chain management, and logistics solutions across the globe.

Map the political terrain utilizing the four metaphoric domains: the weeds, the rocks, the high ground, and the woods. Then create and describe four fictional employees who fit each of the four metaphoric domains (one employee per domain).

1. **Name and description of fictional character 1:**

**James Kwesi, a Senior Strategy Advisor** with 20 years at UPS, masterfully navigates the company's implicit norms and unspoken cultural assumptions. He understands the hidden organizational dynamics that influence decision-making and help bridge cultural gaps in international operations. James's effectiveness comes from his deep understanding of UPS's organizational culture and his ability to work within unstated boundaries while achieving strategic objectives.

2. **Name and description of fictional character 2:**

As the **Corporate Compliance Manager, Patricia Rodriguez** embodies the high ground domain through her strict adherence to organizational systems and procedures. She has developed extensive knowledge of UPS's policies and regulations during her 12-year

tenure. Patricia ensures all operations align with company protocols and industry standards, sometimes at the expense of operational flexibility. She represents the bureaucratic element of organizational politics, wielding influence through formal systems and procedures.

**3. Name and description of fictional character 3:**

**Sarah Chen** works as a *mid-level operations coordinator* who has been with UPS for eight years. She excels at building informal networks and relationships across departments. Without holding formal authority, Sarah influences decisions through her extensive connections and knowledge of unofficial communication channels. She often resolves conflicts before they reach management and helps new employees navigate the company's unwritten rules. Her influence stems from soft power and personal relationships rather than formal authority.

**4. Name and description of fictional character 4:**

**Marcus Thompson** serves as the *Regional Operations Director*, representing the formal power structure within UPS. With 15 years of experience, he relies heavily on his position's authority and expertise to implement changes and maintain control. Marcus frequently uses his formal title and access to resources to influence decisions, sometimes creating tension with those who prefer more collaborative approaches. His leadership style exemplifies the "hard power" characteristic of the rock's domain.

### The four metaphors of organizational politics

Map the political terrain utilizing the four metaphoric domains: the weeds, the rocks, the high ground, and the woods. Place the names of each of the fictional characters where they fit into each of the four metaphoric domains (one employee per domain).

<p><b>The Woods</b>  <b>James Kwesi</b>  <b>Senior Strategy Advisor</b>          (Cultural Interpreter)</p> <p><i>The woods</i> represent a more ambiguous domain where hidden assumptions, implicit norms, and unspoken routines dominate. In this domain, employees may operate in a space that offers both cover and confusion. Success in the woods often requires the ability to make the implicit explicit and to challenge the unspoken norms that shape organizational behavior.</p>	<p><b>The High Grounds</b>  <b>Patricia Rodriguez</b>  <b>Corporate Compliance Manager</b>          (Systems Navigator)</p> <p><i>The high ground</i> combines formal authority with organizational rules and structures. Employees in this domain rely on organizational policies, procedures, and systems to maintain power. While these rules can provide stability, they can also stifle innovation and create bureaucratic inertia.</p>
<p><b>The Weeds</b>  <b>Sarah Chen</b>  <b>mid-level operations coordinator</b>          (Informal Network Specialist)</p> <p><i>The weeds</i> represent the domain where personal influence and informal networks thrive. In this domain, people rely on relationships and social capital to wield power. At UPS, “the weeds” could involve employees who build coalitions or informal alliances to push their agendas, often below the radar of formal authority.</p>	<p><b>The Rocks</b>  <b>Marcus Thompson</b>  <b>Regional Operations Director</b>          (Authority-Based Leader)</p> <p><i>The rocks</i> are characterized by formal authority and hard power. Employees in this domain hold significant political capital due to their roles, titles, or expertise. They are often seen as gatekeepers of resources and organizational power. At UPS, this could involve senior managers or executives whose positions grant them the authority to make or break initiatives.</p>

## Conclusion

The political landscape at UPS demonstrates how different forms of influence and power operate within a large, complex organization. Each domain - represented by Sarah in the weeds, Marcus in the rocks, Patricia in the high ground, and James in the woods - contributes to the organization's political ecosystem. Understanding these dynamics helps in navigating organizational politics effectively and achieving organizational objectives while maintaining positive relationships across all levels.

Understanding and mapping these dynamics not only helps individuals advance their careers but also contributes to the organization's success by aligning personal goals with broader corporate objectives. As Jarrett (2017) suggests, politics, when understood and managed skillfully, can serve as a force for good, helping organizations like UPS meet their strategic goals while fostering a more collaborative work environment.

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## References

Jarrett, M. (2017). The 4 Types of Organizational Politics. *Harvard Business Review*.

<https://hbr.org/2017/04/the-4-types-of-organizational-politics>

Wikipedia contributors. (2024, September 20). *United Parcel Service*. Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Parcel\\_Service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Parcel_Service)