

# Power dynamics

How to exercise influence without formal authority

Andy Weeger

**Top**

[Open slides](#)

Version 0.1 (Summer Term 2023)

## Introduction

Managers must establish anew their credibility as managers able to get things done through others. They have to understand and develop new sources of power and influence if they are going to be able to defend their groups' interests. Thus, in an important sense, they must become “political”—i.e., understand the political dynamics of organizations and build the power and influence necessary to navigate them. *Hill (2003, 272)*

## Preparing for politics ...

### Dicussion

Does leadership require **the art of politics**?

If so, what do you associate with it?

## Power dynamics

Many new managers erroneously believe that the “powerful” are those in more senior positions, because they equate power simply with formal authority *Hill (2003, 272)*



Figure 1: Dilbert comic strip on politics

## On power and politics

Organizations can be seen as both, **cooperative systems** of employees working together to achieve goals and **political arenas** of individuals and groups with differing interests (Brass 2017).

...

**Power** can be defined as the ability to get other people to do what you want them to do, **politics** as *power in action*, using a range of techniques and tactics (Buchanan and Badham 2020).

...

Power and politics is at the heart of how organizations function (Hill 2003).

...

Though, often associated with negative connotations, Buchanan and Badham (2020) shows that the view of the damaging, negative consequences of politics is too narrow. Politics can be both 'functional' and 'dysfunctional'.

## Power and leadership

Other things being equal, political conflict increases with increasing interdependence, diversity, and resource scarcity (Pfeffer 1992).

...

Managers who ignore or fail to understand how power and influence work in organizations will find that they and their teams experience difficulty in being effective and ethical in their work. *Hill (2003, 273)*

. . .

Development of competing coalitions and periods of organizational crisis exacerbate political conflict, while leadership and shared value help to reduce the amount of conflict (Hill 2003).

. . .

Leaders need to define a vision that aligns and motivates people, creates shared values, and a shared culture—these are critical mechanisms for managing the increased diversity and interdependence in organizations today.

## Political conflict in organizations

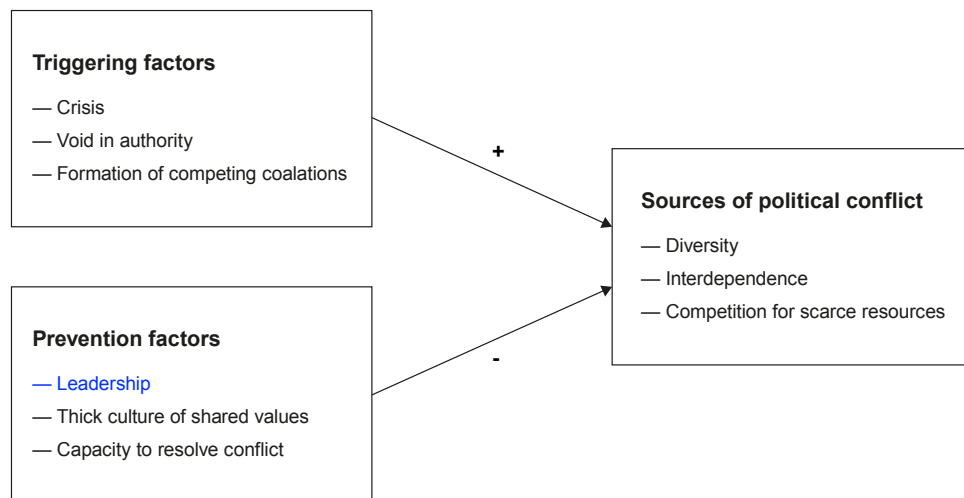


Figure 2: Political conflict in organizations according to Hill (2003, 274)

## Sources of power

Discovering that formal authority is a very limited source of power, new managers must find other ways to get things done [...] they soon learn that power and influ-

ence are the mechanisms by which the inevitable political conflicts in organizations get resolved. *Hill (2003, 274)*

## Dicussion

If it is not a formal authority, what are the main sources of power?

## Personal and positional characteristics

### Sources of personal power (Hill 2003, 276)

- **Expertise:** relevant knowledge and skills
- **Track record:** relevant experience
- **Attractiveness:** attributes that others find appealing and identify with
- **Effort:** expenditure of time and energy

### Sources of positional power (Hill 2003, 276)

- **Formal authority:** position in hierarchy and prescribed responsibilities
- **Relevance:** relationship between task and organizational objectives
- **Centrality:** position in key networks
- **Autonomy:** amount of discretion in a position
- **Visibility:** degree to which performance can be seen by others

## Dicussion

Why is a strong, well-developed network a meaningful source of power?

## Building key relationships

Companies are increasingly required to engage in cross-organizational work (across levels, functions, geographies) in an effort to improve their capacities to execute and innovate.

. . .

Leaders need to build and maintain key relationships to identify changes in the priorities and needs of these groups and prepare their field for new opportunities and threats—a **strong, well-developed network** can provide the kind of big picture information needed in today's world (Brass and Krackhardt 2012).

. . .

It is, thus, required to **identify dependencies**<sup>1</sup>, to **take into account the political dynamics** that make for potential sources of conflict<sup>2</sup>, and to invest time and energy in **building and maintaining relationships** with those on whom the team is dependent<sup>3</sup> (Hill 2003).

It is always better to overestimate rather than underestimate dependencies. *Hill (2003)*

## Final remarks

It is not what you say, but what you do.

*Truism*

## Q&A

## Literature

- Brass, Daniel J. 2017. “Intraorganizational Power and Dependence.” *The Blackwell Companion to Organizations*, 138–57.
- Brass, Daniel J, and David M Krackhardt. 2012. “Power, Politics, and Social Networks in Organizations.” In *Politics in Organizations*, 389–410. Routledge.
- Buchanan, David, and Richard Badham. 2020. *Power, Politics, and Organizational Change*. Sage.
- Hill, Linda Annette. 2003. *Becoming a Manager: How New Managers Master the Challenges of Leadership*. Harvard Business Press.
- Pfeffer, Jeffrey. 1992. *Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations*. Harvard Business Press.

---

<sup>1</sup>Dependencies can be analyzed by asking questions such as *On whom am I dependent, and who depends on me?*

<sup>2</sup>Political dynamics can be understood by asking, e.g., \*What differences exist between me and the people on whom I am dependent? What sources of power do I have to influence this relationship?

<sup>3</sup>Questions like *What can be done to cultivate or repair the relationship?* help to cultivate relationships