

# Organizational Politics: How Internal Power Struggles Undermine Employee Productivity and Efficiency

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## **Abstract:**

This study examines the detrimental effects of organizational politics on employee performance and workplace dynamics. Through a qualitative case study approach and theoretical framework analysis, I investigate how power conflicts and political maneuvering within organizations can create a negative work environment, akin to a "cold war zone." My findings suggest that organizational politics can significantly decrease employee efficiency, stifle creativity, and hinder productivity. The paper provides insights into the mechanisms by which political dynamics can lead to a toxic work environment and offers implications for managers and organizations seeking to mitigate these effects and foster a more positive and productive workplace culture.

**Keywords:** Organizational Politics, Internal Power Struggle, Employee Productivity and Efficiency, Constructive Criticism, Work Environment, Superior-Subordinate Relationship, Transparency, Motivation.

## **1. Introduction:**

Historically, the quest for power has been a fundamental aspect of human existence, extending back to even pre-evolutionary times. Where there is a society, there is a struggle for power—whether it's for resources, shelter, or survival. In today's context, this power struggle is not limited to human societies alone; it also plays a significant role in global politics. Diplomats interact with one another to navigate this dynamic. In the era of Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization, the primary contest has become a struggle for power itself. Consequently, politics and diplomacy have become increasingly aggressive rather than constructive. This power struggle begins at the grassroots level within organizations, whether governmental, non-governmental, or international. From family members to Members of Parliament, individuals are engaging in politics to secure power in various forms—be it leadership positions, favoritism, salary, promotions, or academic grades. Here, I Will mainly talk about Internal Power Struggle, which shows the inclusive behavior of any kind of Organization. Power struggles within organizations often manifest in two dimensions. Firstly, there is competition aimed at achieving the organization's common goals and objectives. Secondly, there is a struggle driven by personal ambitions. This interplay of politics can cause employees to become disoriented, blurring the lines between organizational and personal goals. While sometimes both sets of goals are met, more often only one is achieved, leading to employee frustration. This confusion can result in diminished motivation and creativity, ultimately reducing productivity. Constructive Criticism and Cooperative

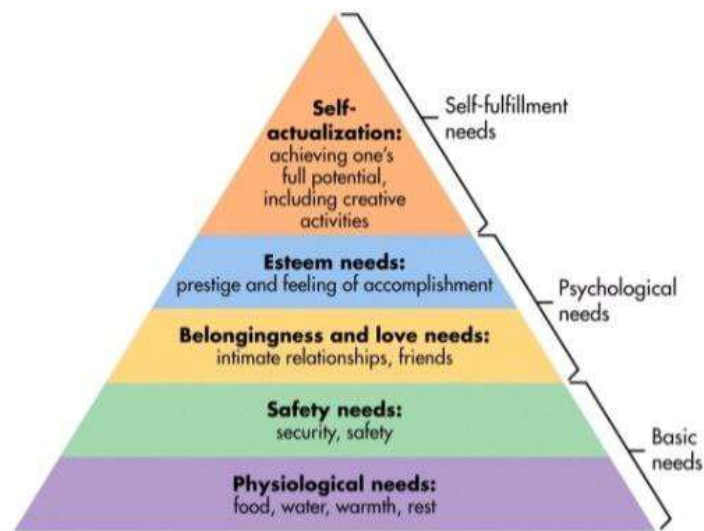
Competition among employees can be beneficial, but excessive politics, particularly when driven by personal agendas, can create a toxic work environment. It is crucial for supervisors to focus on this distinction and address it during the recruitment and training processes. Ultimately, organizations are made up of individuals, each with their own personal needs and desires. Therefore, prioritizing the collective needs of the organization over individual self-interest is essential for maintaining a positive work environment.

## 2. Theories and Typologies:

There are numerous theories concerning organizational politics and employee productivity. However, in my research paper, I will focus on exploring and applying four particular theories and models. Firstly, **Mary Parker Follett**, a pioneering management theorist, saw Constructive Criticism as a vital component of collaboration and integration in the workplace. She introduced the concept of Integrative Conflict Resolution, where opposing parties collaborate to find mutually beneficial solutions instead of adopting a win-lose approach. Follett posits three methods for conflict resolution: Domination, Compromise, and Integration. 1. Domination, while swiftly decisive, breeds resentment and fosters conditions for renewed conflict. 2. Compromise, though common, involves mutual sacrifice and often fails to address underlying issues. 3. Integration or cooperation, however, transcends these approaches by harmonizing differing desires without compromise. It sparks innovation, enhances efficiency, and eradicates conflict's root cause, positioning it as the superior method for achieving lasting resolutions<sup>1</sup> (Raj, 2013). Secondly, after **Elton Mayo's** (The Father of Human-Relation Theory), research on the Hawthorne Studies, he discovered that in the third phase of the experiment, employees within an organization could be classified into three primary categories: 1. Red Busters, who face backlash from peers for their exceptional performance; 2. Chisellers, who receive criticism for their slower work rate; and 3. Squealers, who complaints to their supervisors. These classifications of employees clearly illustrate the varied behaviors within an organization. Some employees provoke you, others offer criticism, and some are prone to reporting every issue to their superiors. Here again we can see the importance of cooperation among employees. Handling Squealers effectively involves fostering an open and supportive work environment where employees feel comfortable addressing concerns directly with their peers. It's crucial to take their complaints seriously and address them promptly, demonstrating that their feedback is valued. Providing clear procedures for reporting issues can help ensure that concerns are raised appropriately, reducing unnecessary escalation to higher management. Additionally, offering constructive feedback and using their input as an opportunity for improvement can be beneficial. Promoting team collaboration encourages conflict resolution among colleagues rather than involving supervisors. Ensuring that supervisors are well-trained to handle complaints and manage their teams can further reduce the frequency of issues reaching higher levels. Thirdly, **Abraham Maslow** primarily discusses the motivational aspects of employees in his work, "A Theory of Human Motivation." In this paper, he introduces the Need Hierarchy Theory of Human Motivation, which represents the initial structured framework of human drive. According to this theory, human needs affect human actions. These needs are organized into five tiers:

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<sup>1</sup> Public Administration (2013), especially Unit 1, Chapter-3, Personnel Administration, Page No 111-112, by Rohit Raj & Aditya Raj.



**1.1 Figure: Maslow's Need Hierarchy** (McLeod., May 21, 2018)

1. **Physiological Needs:** Basic requirements for survival, such as food, water, and shelter.
2. **Safety Needs:** The need for security, stability, and protection.
3. **Belongingness and Love Needs:** The desire for social relationships, affection, and a sense of belonging.
4. **Esteem Needs:** The need for self-esteem, respect from others, and recognition.
5. **Self-Actualization Needs:** The aspiration to realize one's potential and achieves personal growth<sup>2</sup> (McLeod, May, 21, 2018).

Again, Maslow categorized these needs into two main types:

1. **Deficiency Needs (D-needs):** These needs arise from deprivation and act as motivators when unfulfilled. The longer a deficiency need is denied, the stronger the motivation to satisfy it becomes. Examples of deficiency needs include physiological needs (food, water, shelter), safety needs (security, stability), love/belonging needs (social connections, intimacy), and esteem needs (respect, achievement).
2. **Growth Needs (B-needs):** These needs stem from a desire for personal growth and development rather than a lack of something. Even after being reasonably satisfied, growth needs continue to be felt and can become even stronger. The ultimate growth need is self-actualization, which involves fulfilling one's potential and living a purposeful life. Progression through the Hierarchy Maslow originally suggested that individuals must satisfy lower-level deficiency needs before moving on to higher-level growth needs. However, he later clarified that need satisfaction is not an all-or-nothing process. Once a deficiency need is "more or less" fulfilled, it becomes less urgent, and our focus shifts to meeting the next unsatisfied need. This becomes our primary motivation. Disruptions to Progress Life events like divorce, job loss, or trauma can disrupt an individual's progress through the hierarchy<sup>3</sup> (Balicoco). Fourthly, **Likert** discussed the Linking Pin Model, aiming to eliminate obstacles present in conventional

<sup>2</sup> Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (May 21, 2018), by Saul McLeod.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.studocu.com/ph/document/cebu-technological-university/bachelor-of-secondary-education-major-in-english/balicoco-jhon-rey-output-3/40615255>

hierarchies and promote the development of the Interaction Influence System. He envisioned the Linking Pin Model with the following key attributes:

- Each person in the organization holds dual roles, acting as a member of a **higher-tier** group;
- And as a leader of a **lower-tier** group.

Likert's Linking Pin Model offers several significant benefits to organizations. By acting as a bridge between different levels, individuals enhance communication, reducing misunderstandings and ensuring that important messages reach all tiers of the organization. This model improves coordination by synchronizing activities across various groups, aligning them with organizational goals and boosting overall efficiency. Additionally, it promotes greater employee engagement by involving more individuals in leadership roles, fostering a sense of ownership, responsibility, and increased motivation. Decision-making becomes faster and more informed due to direct links between levels, allowing for quicker responses to challenges. The model also increases flexibility, making management structures more adaptable to changes<sup>4</sup> (Raj., 2013).

These theories emphasize the importance of effective **conflict resolution, understanding diverse employee behaviors, addressing motivational needs, and improving organizational communication and coordination**. Integrating these principles can lead to more effective management practices and a more harmonious and productive work environment.

#### Examples of Famous Case Studies on Organizational Politics:

- Tech Innovators Inc., a leading technology company, experienced significant internal power struggles among its top executives, with the CEO, CTO, and CFO each pushing different visions for the company's future. The CEO focused on aggressive market expansion and acquisitions, the CTO prioritized innovation and product development, and the CFO advocated for cost-cutting measures and financial stability. This misalignment caused confusion among employees due to conflicting messages about company priorities, decreased cross-functional collaboration, and a tense work environment that lowered morale. As a result, projects were delayed, top talent left the company, and revenue targets were missed due to inefficiencies and delayed product launches. This case highlights the importance of a unified leadership team, clear and consistent communication, and effective conflict resolution mechanisms<sup>5678</sup> (htt2) (htt3) (htt4) (htt5).
- City General Hospital faced internal conflicts among its management team, including the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Chief Nursing Officer (CNO), and Hospital Administrator. The CMO focused on patient care quality and medical research, the CNO prioritized nursing staff welfare and patient safety, and the Administrator emphasized cost control and operational efficiency. These conflicting priorities led to divided departments operating in silos, increased stress and burnout among employees, and decreased patient care quality. Consequently, there was an increase in patient complaints, high levels of burnout and turnover among medical staff, and increased operational costs due to inefficiency. This case underscores the importance of fostering interdepartmental

<sup>4</sup> Public Administration (2013), Unit 1, Chapter- 3, Personnel Administration, Page No 129-130, by Rohit Raj and Aditya Raj.

<sup>5</sup> <https://fullscale.io/blog/ceo-vs-cto/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://careersidekick.com/ceo-vs-cfo-differences-in-roles-responsibilities-salaries/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://clockwise.software/blog/what-is-the-c-suite/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://northwest.education/insights/executive-leadership/ceo-vs-coo-vs-cfo-roles-and-responsibilities/>

collaboration, establishing shared goals, and implementing support systems to reduce employee stress and prevent burnout<sup>9101112</sup> (Porter, 2013) (Aiken, 2002) (Drucker) (Follett).

- At Global Consumer Goods Corporation, the marketing department experienced rivalry between two senior marketing managers, each leading a different product line. Manager A focused on traditional marketing channels and had strong relationships with retail partners, while Manager B advocated for digital marketing strategies and direct-to-consumer sales. This rivalry divided employees into competing teams, caused inequitable resource allocation, and stifled innovation as teams focused more on internal competition than market challenges. The company lost market share to competitors, experienced a decline in creativity and innovation, and saw a drop in sales and revenue due to fragmented and ineffective marketing strategies. This case demonstrates the necessity of a unified marketing strategy, fair resource allocation processes, and a culture that fosters collaboration and innovation rather than competition. These case studies highlight the detrimental effects of organizational politics and internal power struggles on employee productivity and efficiency<sup>131415</sup> (htt6) (htt7) (htt8).

### 3. Findings and Conclusion:

After a thorough examination and evaluation of various theories and models, I have arrived at the principal conclusions here: First, while every organization experiences politics to some extent, providing *constructive feedback* is the primary method to counteract the adverse impact of office politics. Second, cultivating *awareness* of the organization's dynamics and power structures enables you to navigate interactions wisely. Third, *clear and transparent communication* helps minimize misunderstandings and conflicts. Fourth, Building *strong supportive relationships*, with colleagues creates a network of allies who can offer guidance and support. Fifth, maintaining a high standard of *professionalism and avoiding gossip* or negative behavior is crucial. Finally, *practicing empathy* by understanding and respecting the perspectives and motivations of others helps navigate interpersonal dynamics effectively.

From the vantage point of top management, power struggles among subordinates are seen as a means to demonstrate their effectiveness. Here, the essence of true *Leadership* becomes apparent. A genuine leader must identify the true employee, steering clear of toxic tactics such as invalid or deceptive feedback. Furthermore, a *Robust Survey Mechanism* can enhance organizational structure. Therefore, top managers should regularly update themselves with survey results to refine the system. It is also crucial for superiors to avoid *favoritism* when recognizing genuine employees, even though the truly exceptional ones often become favorites naturally. Lastly, many employees in private organizations desire job security, driven by a *pervasive sense of job insecurity*. For instance, employees at Tata feel more secure and productive, experiencing a sense of belonging to the organization although it is a

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<sup>9</sup> Porter, M. E., & Lee, T. H. (2013). The strategy that will fix health care. *Harvard Business Review*, 91(10), 50-70.

<sup>10</sup> Aiken, L. H., Clarke, S. P., Sloane, D. M., Sochalski, J., & Silber, J. H. (2002). Hospital nurse staffing and patient mortality, nurse burnout, and job dissatisfaction. *JAMA*, 288(16), 1987-1993.

<sup>11</sup> "Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices" by Peter Drucker

<sup>12</sup> Mary Parker Follett's works on management and organizational theory

<sup>13</sup> <https://panmore.com/unilever-five-forces-analysis-porters-model-recommendations>

<sup>14</sup> <https://drbrandagency.com/digital-marketing/unilever-marketing-strategy/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/the-new-model-for-consumer-goods>

Private Organization. Loyalty and dedication to tasks arise only when employees feel *Welcomed and Valued*, a transformation that can be instigated by top-level management or the organization's founders.

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