Chapter 14
Power, Politics and Conflict

What the Chapter Covers

Like Chapters 11 to 13, this one deals with phenomena that are largely encountered at the group (or intergroup) level. In conceptual terms power, politics and conflict are three different topics, but in practice they are strongly connected and for this reason they are brought together in a single chapter. This covers:

Power:
- a definition
- a description and explanation of the interpersonal and contextual sources from which individuals and groups derive their power
- a discussion of the tactical use of power.

Organisational Politics:
- a definition
- a description of circumstances that tend to give rise to political behaviour
- a consideration of the persuasiveness of the phenomenon and the ethics of political action
- a description of political tactics commonly used in organisations.

Conflict:
- a definition
- the distinction between competition and conflict
- a comparison of traditional and contemporary views on conflict
- an explanation of the factors giving rise to conflict in organisations
- a conceptual model, which portrays the typical sequence of events in a conflict episode.

The chapter closes with a short conclusions and overview section, which highlights the interconnected nature of power, politics and conflict. Although all of them tend to be regarded as three of the less palatable aspects of organisational life, they are largely inescapable. For this reason, as well as examining the topics and addressing the eight learning outcomes set out at its start, the chapter contains three interconnected themes:

1. There are strong connections between power, politics and conflict. Ultimately power is the capability to get another individual or group to modify its behaviour and politics consist of activities undertaken to acquire, develop and use power to influence others. Thus conflict most often arises in situations where two power holders, be they individuals or groups, clash, usually because both have tried other ways of influencing each other’s behaviour, and these ways have failed.

2. Far from being abnormal or aberrant, all three phenomena are everyday features of organisational life. Organisations are vehicles of power and forums for acquiring and exercising power. Since those at the top of organisations often protect themselves by severely rationing the power of those below, it is not surprising that manoeuvrings for the acquisition of power take place between, and at all organisational levels. Neither is it surprising that these manoeuvrings sometimes erupt into bouts of overt conflict.
3. Power, politics and conflict are all Janus faced. They can be used for benevolent humanistic ends, or they can be used to dominate and oppress other people.

**Instructional Approaches**

**Resources Provided**

As well as the text, the chapter contains other material to facilitate student learning:
- two short case studies, that allow students to apply concepts as they appear in the text
- to illustrate the real world applicability of concepts in the chapter, a number of OB in Action boxes also appear at intervals throughout the text
- review and discussion questions are provided at the end of the chapter and these can be used to integrate its contents
- a longer case study is provided later in this chapter of the Instructor’s Manual, which can also be used to integrate the chapter’s contents
- although primarily intended for self-study, the Time Out exercises in the chapter can also be used as vehicles for classroom discussion
- a number of supplementary teaching and assessment materials are provided later in this chapter of the Instructor’s Manual.

Chapter 14 of the book also contains ten diagrams and to enable lecturers to use these for illustrative or explanatory purposes in teaching sessions, OHT masters are provided separately on the website.

**Instructional Approaches**

Because students are unlikely to have any prior exposure to the three topics covered in the chapter, it can be difficult to deal with its contents in only two hours of classroom instruction. Thus if a conventional, lecturer-centred approach is used, in which the two hours is split between lecture and tutorial, either two weeks instruction is required, or some of the chapter needs to be omitted. If a student-centred learning approach is adopted, it is just about possible to cover it in a single two-hour seminar, providing students pre-read the chapter, including the case studies. The seminar could start with a short (20 minute) review of the material read prior to the class, with the remainder of the time being taken up with working through the case and exercises.

The eight learning outcomes for the chapter, the sections that address each one and whether chapter themes are also surfaced are summarised in Table IM14.1 following, which also shows sections that could be omitted if time is short.
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<td>Explain some of the ways in which power is used in organisations</td>
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<td>Fig 14.3, 14.4</td>
<td>Case 14.1 Case 14.3</td>
<td>Themes 1, 2 &amp; 3</td>
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<td>Define organisational politics and describe the factors that give rise to behaviour of this type</td>
<td>Politics – introduction and definition 418-419 Factors giving rise to political behaviour 419-420</td>
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<td>Fig 14.5</td>
<td>Case 14.3</td>
<td>Themes 1, 2 &amp; 3</td>
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<td>Define organisational conflict and distinguish conflict from competition</td>
<td>Conflict – introduction and definition 427-428</td>
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<td>Theme 2</td>
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<td>Explain traditional and current perspectives on conflict in organisations</td>
<td>Traditional and contemporary views 428-430</td>
<td>Fig 14.6</td>
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<td>Describe the factors that give rise to conflict in organisations and explain the stages of a conflict episode</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explain what is meant by functional and dysfunctional conflict and describe methods that can be used to resolve or stimulate conflict in organisations</td>
<td>Conflict management 436-440 Overview and conclusions 441-442</td>
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</table>

Table IM.14.1: Learning Outcomes Related to Chapter Contents and Associated Teaching Materials
* these items can be omitted if time is short
Teaching Materials in Textbook

Time Out Exercises

In what follows prompts are given, which have been found useful to start discussion where these exercises are used in classroom sessions.

Exercise on page 404: Sources of Power

Since this exercise comes before the consideration of interpersonal bases of power, as yet students will have no theoretical framework around which to develop their answers. However, it can be used as a prelude to considering the bases of interpersonal power, and student responses could then be summarised, and an attempt made to slot them into French and Raven’s five categories.

Question 1

It is usually easier for a student to identify a power holder where the person holds power over the student. As such, it can be useful to suggest that the student re-examine Tawney’s (1931) definition given on page 403, and ask themselves ‘who is able to get me to modify my behaviour, without that person having to modify his or her behaviour?’

Question 2

Here it can be suggested that the student ask him/herself to identify other people that he/she can get to change their behaviour, without the student having to change in return.

Exercise on page 421: Political Activity

The question here puts the reader in the role of an official of the student union (SU). It should be noted that there is nothing in the scenario that explicitly states that the university or college would withdraw all financial support from the SU, although in practical terms, it might be likely that it would reduce its contribution. Neither does the scenario state that any such step has occurred, merely that the government has made an announcement. These points should be drawn to the attention of students and to get them started, the general questions given below can be asked.

What do you feel could possibly happen as a result of the Government announcement? How would this affect the union? Will it affect everyone in the union equally?

Students should then be allowed to answer these questions, which can be followed by others, for example:

- how could the union fight any cuts (political action against the government or university)?
- are some groups in the SU likely to fight their corner harder than others, and in what ways (political activity between groups in the SU)?
Exercise on page 427: Political Tactics

This exercise is a continuation of the earlier one on page 421. By now however, students should have some awareness of the range of political tactics that can be brought in to play in organisations. To get students focused on the exercise it can be suggested that they re-examine their answers to questions 2 and 3 in the previous Time Out, and then direct their attention to the discussion on pages 423-425, which categorises the different political tactics. Students could then be asked to state which of these tactics could possibly be used and what the tactics would be likely to achieve.

Exercise on page 430: Different Perspectives on Conflict

In this exercise it can be important to look behind the rhetoric of mission statements and pronouncements by employers or college officials, to try to identify the underlying philosophy at work. In the university example, it can sometimes be helpful to get students to identify specific groups that make up a university; for example, students, academic staff, administrative staff, support staff (library and computing), senior management. They could then be asked to focus their answers on similarities and differences between these groups. If this is done students seldom have problems with questions 1 and 2. However, question 3 often results in some outlandish answers and it should be recognised that any answer to question 4 might at best be highly speculative.

Case Studies

Teaching Notes for Case Study 14.1: Mr Preston

Timing

Since the case illustrates a very specific point, it should only take students about 10 minutes to read the material and produce an answer.

Suggested Use of Case

The case is designed to be a short, hands-on exercise in applying the Yukl (1981) scheme, which categorises the most appropriate use of French and Raven’s (1959) bases of power for different types of subordinate. As such, it is probably most appropriately used at the end of the consideration of power.

Suggested Answer

According to Yukl, Mr Preston uses an appropriate style for both subordinates. This can be illustrated with reference to Table IM14.2 below:
Table IM 14.2: Uses of Power Bases with Bill Townsend and Harry Left

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power Base</th>
<th>Bill Townsend (Committed subordinate)</th>
<th>Harry Left (Resistant subordinate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reward Power</td>
<td>Emphasises importance of doing a favour for the power holder.</td>
<td>Avoids arrogance or manipulation and emphasises advantage to subordinate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent Power</td>
<td>Not used</td>
<td>Not used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Power</td>
<td>Emphasises commonality in the goals of the power holder and subordinate.</td>
<td>Not used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive Power</td>
<td>Avoids</td>
<td>Avoids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate Power</td>
<td>Careful use of authority, but in a polite way.</td>
<td>Emphasises the desires of those above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teaching Notes for Case Study 14.2: Shop Steward Negotiating Styles

Timing
This case also illustrates a very specific point, and so it should only take students about 10 minutes to read the material and produce an answer.

Suggested Use of Case
Again this case can be used as a short, hands-on exercise in a formal teaching session. It is designed to give students the opportunity to identify some of the more obvious indications of different conflict handling styles. As such it is best introduced after conflict handling has been covered.

Suggested Answer
David: A competitive style, with a shift (probably reluctantly) to compromise if he is resisted.
Phil: A collaborative style.

Review and Discussion Questions

Question 1
See pp 405-411 of text

Interpersonal Bases: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, expert power.
Contextual Sources: knowledge and information, resources, decision making, network, culture, external environment.

The contextual bases reinforce each other and also reinforce interpersonal bases – see pp 407-411 of text.
Question 2

See pp 413-415 of text

Figure 14.3 in the text shows (in order of frequency of use) the tactics used in an upward direction, which are: rationality, coalitions, friendliness, bargaining, assertiveness, higher authority. Those used downwards in order of frequency are: rationality, assertiveness, friendliness, coalitions, bargaining, higher authority, sanctions.

Question 3

See pp 421-422 of text

The correct answer is given in Table 14.2 on page 422 of the text, which summarises Mintzberg’s (1985) evidence. Note however, that it is not politics itself that is dysfunctional, but how political tactics are used and the ends to which they are directed.

Question 4

See pp 422-423 of text

Cavanagh et al. (1981) give three criteria, all of which need to be satisfied to justify the use of political tactics on ethical grounds. That is: utilitarian criterion, individual rights criterion, distributive justice criterion.

At face value, so long as all three are satisfied, it would seem to be ethically justifiable to use political tactics. Note however, that political action is normally covert and so nobody but the person who takes the action really knows whether the criteria are satisfied. In addition, for every criterion Cavanagh et al. provide an escape clause that allows it to be ignored if there are compelling reasons. This raises the obvious question of who decides how compelling the reasons have to be; it is all too easy to justify anything if we persuade ourselves hard enough.

Question 5

See pp 428-430 of text

Unitarist Perspective
Assumptions - that everyone is on the same side and that conflict is unnatural.
Implications for handling conflict – eradicate conflict, either by exerting pressure on the assumed troublemakers, or appealing to everyone to pull together.

Pluralist Perspective
Assumption - conflict is (potentially) a natural state of affairs because different individuals and groups have their own aims that they seek to achieve.
Implications for handling conflict – set up handling mechanisms so that conflict can come to the surface where it can be handled and resolved so that the organisation as a whole is not disrupted by the conflict

Radical Perspective
Assumption – organisational conflict merely a reflection of conflict between social classes in wider society, e.g. those who own the organisation and those who sell their labour to it; thus all conflict is between different levels in a hierarchy.
Implications for handling conflict – because the root causes (social inequalities) need to be addressed, it can’t really be handled at the level of an organisation.

**Interactionist Perspective**
Assumption – there is an optimum level of organisational conflict; too little and the organisation stagnates, too much and it is disrupted (a refined form of pluralism). Implications for handling – achieve optimum level; promote conflict if there is too little, resolve it where it is too disruptive.

**Question 6**
See pp 433-436 of text

The three stages are: Pre-episode Stage, Conflict Process Stage, Outcomes Stage, and the factors active at each stage are show in Figure 14.8 on page 434 of the text.
Supplementary Teaching Materials

Tutorial Questions

1. What are the five important implications drawn from the definition of power given in the text?

2. Two common misconceptions about the use of power are given in the text. What are these and what are their major implications?

3. State the six general conclusions that are drawn in the text about power and its use.

4. Define the expression ‘organisational politics’ and state the three implications given in the text that can be drawn from the definition.

5. Describe the organisational factors that can give rise to political activity.

6. Describe the seven most commonly used political tactics in organisations.

7. Name the four general groups of tactics given by Mintzberg (1983) for describing political behaviour in his ‘game playing’ framework.

8. What is the distinction made in the text between competition and conflict?

9. Name the four groups of factors that can give rise to conflict in organisations and explain how the factors in each group can result in conflicts.

10. What is a conflict episode?

11. Describe Thomas’s (1976) model, which classifies conflict handling styles into five types.

12. What guidelines are offered by Thomas (1977) for selecting an appropriate conflict handling style according to the prevailing circumstances?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Outline Answers</th>
<th>Pages in Text</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1               | a) Power does not exist in isolation  
|                 | b) It is situational  
|                 | c) Relative power is more important than absolute power  
|                 | d) Authority is a special type of power  
|                 | e) In practical terms, the distinction between power and influence is unreal  | 404           |
| 2               | Direction of power flow and visibility of power                                  | 412-413       |
| 3               | a) The tactic must match the circumstances  
|                 | b) The different contexts within which power is used have their own rules for its use  
|                 | c) Occupational/professional biases against power usage can exist  
|                 | d) The effectiveness of power bases and tactics can depend on the circumstances at the time.  
|                 | e) Sources of power do not appear overnight and need to be nurtured  
|                 | f) The effect of different bases of power is additive  | 416-417       |
| 4               | See definition in text  
|                 | a) Conceptually power and politics are different  
|                 | b) Politics rife where there is uncertainty  
|                 | c) Politics concerns descencus about choices  | 418           |
| 5               | Ambiguous goals; Scarce resources; Technology and Environment; Non-programmed decisions; Organisational change; Role ambiguity; Unclear performance evaluation criteria; Culture; Low trust  | 419-420       |
| 6               | Control of information; Dominating information flows; Use of outside experts; Control of agendas; Image building; Coalition building; Control of decision parameters  | 423-425       |
| 7               | Authority games, Power Base games, Rivalry games; Change games  | 425-426       |
| 8               | Conflict involves one individual or group deliberately blocking the goals of another, whereas competition does not involve deliberate goal blocking  | 428           |
| 9               | Organisational structure and design factors; Cultural factors; Personal factors, Communication factors.  | 431-433       |
| 10              | See discussion in text  | 407           |
| 11              | See figure 14.10 in text  | 437           |
| 12              | See discussion in text  | 438           |

Table IM14.3: Sources of Answers to Tutorial Questions
Supplementary Case

Case Study 14.3: Hospital Administrative Staff

This case concerns a clinical department in a large National Health Service (NHS) hospital in Great Britain, and deals with events when it became part of a self-governing trust during the NHS reforms instigated by the Thatcher government in the 1980s.

Prior to the reforms two main groups of staff were encountered in hospitals: medical staff (doctors and nurses) and non-medical personnel (everyone else, from senior administrators to porters). Clinical departments were headed by medical doctors (clinical directors), run by medical staff, and the bulk of administrative work was undertaken centrally in the hospital. However, some administrative personnel such as secretaries and clerks could be found in clinical departments and although they were technically part of the central administrative system, they took their day-to-day instructions from medical personnel. In common with most other NHS hospitals it was funded by central government, and clinical departments were given budgets that tended to increase each year.

When the hospital became a self-governing trust matters changed considerably. It was now required to stand on its own feet financially, with a large proportion of its income to be derived from fund-holding general practitioners (GPs). That is, family doctors who contracted annually for a hospital, or group of hospitals to provide necessary clinical services for all the patients in a GP’s practice. This virtually forced clinical directorates to function like subsidiaries of a large business. The central administrative functions of the hospital such as finance and record keeping now became much more important, and before long the number of administrative staff grew considerably. Each clinical department was allocated its own chief administrator, who was in charge of most non-medical staff and who became far more active in controlling finances and trying to reduce costs. For instance by introducing new paperwork systems and counting the occupancy rate of beds, to see whether small wards could be closed in the interests of economy. However, the most significant change took place silently and was not really noticed by medical staff until nearly two years later, when they realised that there was more than a hint of arrogance in the way that they were regarded by administrators. Administrators actually began to tell doctors and nurses what was and was not permissible expenditure and, as one doctor put it, ‘So far as they are concerned, we are the labourers and they are the managers’ and when this dawned on medical people, there was a great deal of resentment.

Much of what happened to change the relative positions of medical and administrative staff can be traced to three connected factors. These were: the working relationship between the chief clinician and the departmental administrator (head of administrative staff), the changed nature of the organisation as it swung over to becoming a self-governing trust, and procedures put in place by administrators to cope with this.

Because the new organisation had a much stronger emphasis on financial efficiency it was completely different from what existed before, and somewhat alien to medical staff, most of whom were only interested in patient care. The medical head of one department (clinical director) had little incentive to become deeply involved because he was only a few years from retirement. He relied heavily on the senior departmental
administrator, with whom he held frequent one-to-one meetings, and who had somehow managed to become part of the departmental management group – a small team comprising the director and other consultants. Because of his close working relationship with the director the administrator sometimes assumed the mantle of second in command, and he soon pushed for an immediate increase in the number of administrative staff. This was agreed by the clinical director, who also asked the administrator to sort out ways that the department could best handle matters under the new system.

The situation at the end of the first year was chaotic. The trust made a financial loss, and there was talk of redundancies. This resulted in even more emphasis on controlling costs and the administrative head of the whole hospital persuaded the governors of the trust to bring in management consultants. The management consultants recommended that the institution distinguish between managing the hospital and providing clinical services, so that medical staff could be freed up from administration and get on with providing patient care. This was accepted, and administrators quickly developed a perspective in which they were the guardians of the smooth running of the organisation and medical staff were primarily well-qualified technicians. The administrative staff installed a number of procedures, for example one in which all orders for drugs, equipment and supplies had to be authorised by the chief administrator as well as the clinical director, which gave them effective control in many areas. They were also active in studying the turnover rate of beds in wards, and were instrumental in getting one ward closed on the grounds that there were more beds than needed. They studied medical staffing levels and, in the interests of economy, were successful in getting medical vacancies frozen. Finally new computerised systems were introduced for patient records, access to which was strictly via an administrator, on the grounds of safeguarding confidential information. All this increased administrative workload, which was remedied by employing additional administrators and secretaries. In summary therefore, a situation had been reached in which all decision making, other than that about patient treatment, was in the hands of administrative staff, who effectively controlled the department.

The first two years as a self-governing trust had been extremely busy as medical staff and administrators came to terms with the new system and adapted to the new procedures. After two years another wave of changes, including a significant increase in patient numbers, occurred, which further reinforced administrative control. These changes put additional burdens on medical staff, leaving them little time to become more familiar with new procedures, and by the end of the third year they had become even more reliant on administrative staff. Administrators recognised this and, among themselves, said that the department would grind to a halt without their efforts. While the systems and procedures were somewhat rigid and bureaucratic, as they saw matters the procedures worked, which was entirely due to their efforts. Moreover, since it had been left to administrative staff to find a way through the mess, they believed that they had the right to construct a way of working that suited them. Emboldened by their new-found degree of control, administrators introduced a number of other practices that enhanced their control in other areas and potentially put them at loggerheads with medical staff. A purge on overhead expenses such as stationery created some pressure for control procedures. As a result medical staff found that there were many things that they could not do without administrative consent, which created a certain amount of seething discontent beneath the surface.

Matters came to a head at one of the departmental management group meetings. Without consulting anyone else, an administrative assistant fixed the date of the
meeting, but no agenda or background papers were circulated. Thus senior medical
staff arrived to find that several papers that they had prepared for consideration, for
example about suggested new staff appointments and new equipment, had not been
circulated, nor were they available for consideration by the meeting. The clinical
director (who, as head of department, chaired the meeting) enquired about this. The
reply he received from the departmental administrator was that the items had been
removed from the agenda for two reasons: because it had been decided that the freeze
on new appointments should continue, and that no funds could be spared for new
equipment. The senior clinician then asked who had authorised these decisions, to
which the administrator replied that there were really no decisions to make because he
controlled the department’s finances. To this the chairman replied, ‘No, you
administer the finance on behalf of the department, of which I am head. You do not
control anything.’ The chairman also reminded him that, according to the rules of
committee procedure, the agenda of a meeting was the property of its chairperson
and must be approved by the chair before its use. Therefore, to enable the medical staff to
have time to read documentation before they made decisions, he would adjourn the
meeting for one week; in the meantime he required a draft agenda to be presented to
him for approval that afternoon. The administrator attempted to assert himself by
saying, ‘You can’t do that, there are matters I wish to have discussed.’ Whereupon the
chairperson formally closed the meeting and left the room, closely followed by all the
other medical staff.

**Task**

Using the material given in the case answer the following questions.

1. What were the bases of power of administrative staff that enabled them to acquire
   their position of control?

2. Were these bases of power already in existence or were they created by
   administrative staff?

3. Name the political tactics used by administrative staff to acquire and maintain
   power.

4. Analyse the conflict that erupted between the administrative and medical staff and
   state:
   (a) what stage of a conflict episode had been reached
   (b) what demands were likely to be formulated by each of the two groups of staff
   (c) what you feel would be the nature of the conflict process from then on
   (d) what you feel would be the approaches (handling styles) of the respective
      parties to the conflict.
Teaching Notes for Case Study 14.3: Hospital Administrative Staff

Timing
There is a fair amount of information to be assimilated, and the case questions require that this be carefully analysed. This is likely to take some time and so it is much better if students are required to complete the bulk of this work away from the classroom, and to compare their findings in the classroom session. Indeed, there is much to be gained from putting students into groups to work away from the classroom, and using the classroom session to compare their answers.

Suggested Use of the Case
The main purpose of the case is to give students some practice in analysing a complex situation where power, politics and conflict are at work and to integrate these three topics. In particular, it provides the opportunity to explore how the pursuit of power can often erupt into a conflict episode. For this reason it is necessary for students to have covered all of the three topics in Chapter 14 before the case is used. Although it is envisaged that most lecturers will use the case for classroom work, it is also suitable as a vehicle for a written assignment (individual or group based). Provided it is handed out well in advance (normally without questions) it would also be suitable for examination purposes.

When used in a classroom session, debriefing can be used to bring together a number of important points about power, politics and conflict that emerge from the case. These are given below.

1. Although there is often a tendency to regard all conflict as a matter which occurs between individuals, individual clashes are often a sign of conflict between the groups to which the individuals belong.

2. Whenever there are multiple sources of authority (power) there is a potential for conflicts of interest.

3. A change in the context surrounding two or more groups sometimes results in the opportunity for one of them to assert its independence of, or dominance over the other. As such, there is usually a strong connection between conflict, political manoeuvring and shifting balances of power in an organisation. In this case changed contextual circumstances associated with the NHS reforms brought about a change in the ‘rules of the game’. It was no longer possible to follow the prior funding criteria, i.e. that ‘revenues will rise to meet costs’. Instead the regime became one in which ‘costs must be contained to be kept within revenues’. The prior system made those who incurred the expenses (medical staffs) all powerful, whereas in the new regime those who keep the records and show whether costs are within budgets have much more power. To some extent this created a situation in which medical staff were relegated to the position of providing a service, whereas those who kept the accounts and attempted to ensure that the organisation stayed within budgets had a rationale for asserting that it is they who really run the hospital. However, it is the medical staff who made up the prior elite and the administrators who were the backup service. As such the prior elite were almost bound to resent a potential loss of their previously unchallenged authority.
4. The bases of power are seldom purely interpersonal in nature. In the situation described, power has gyrated away from one group to another because of a change in contextual circumstances.

5. Crises, such as the one described in the case (the chaotic situation at the end of the first year) often facilitate a transfer of power to the group that conveys the impression that it can put things right.

6. The use of power (and the tactics used to acquire it) are not always visible. As such, the transfer of power sometimes occurs without it being noticed until afterwards.

7. The roots of an outbreak of intergroup conflict sometimes extend backwards in time. In this case the origins can be traced to the NHS reforms, which established an opportunity for administrators to pursue power. They largely did this by using political tactics, which gradually increased the potential for an outbreak of conflict.

8. This, however, only established a potential for conflict to occur, and a trigger was needed before overt conflict arose.

9. How long the episode lasts and what happens next depends on the parties, i.e. their aims and the power that they can mobilise to pursue the conflict. This is almost impossible to predict in advance.

**Suggested Answers**

*Question 1*

The bases of power of administrators are summarised in table IM14.4 following:
Table IM14.4: Power Bases of Administrative Staff

Question 2

Most of the power bases existed before the NHS reforms. For example, the chief clinician was already dependent on the senior administrator, the administrative network throughout the hospital existed, and above all, a culture that distinguished between clinical and administrative tasks was firmly in place. Thus it was mainly the changes prompted by events in the external environment that enabled administrators to expand their power and use them to acquire other bases of power. Much of this was done in a covert way through the use of political tactics.
Question 3

Virtually all of the political tactics described in pages 423-425 of the book have been used by administrators. Control and Domination of Information, the Use of Outside Experts, Image Building, Coalitions and Control of Decision Parameters have all become more prevalent across time. Arguably, the attempt to Control Agendas has become the spark that has set-off the conflict.

Question 4

i. The Source of the Issue is the causal factors that have been gradually building in intensity for some time and these have resulted in:
   - An Issue: the gyration of power from medical staff to administrators
   - Inter-party Climate: increasing acrimony
   - Perceptions of Parties: increased confidence by administrators, resentment by medical staffs.

ii. The chief clinician has actually put his demands on the table. Although this refers to a specific item of procedure, it reflects a wider sentiment that ‘administrators should revert to a support role and cease attempting to control medical staff’. While the chief administrator would have little choice but to comply with this instruction, he is not likely to let matters drop. One way or another, either overtly or by a series of covert actions, he is likely to demand that medical staff now fall into line by adopting the subservient role that administrators have designated.

iii. In all likelihood, a phase of intense political manoeuvring will now take place in which each party will try to build up its resources for the coming power struggle. Administrative staff could well try to make their point by becoming even more pedantic about following procedures. In return, medical staff, who ultimately control the details of the process for patient care could well play the game of using every opportunity to show how the newly installed administrative procedures stand in the way of effective patient treatment. Indeed, if all else fails, there could be an element of discreet ‘whistle-bowing’ to the press, i.e. to create the impression that dedicated medical professionals are thwarted at every step in their attempts to provide patient care by a top heavy bureaucracy.

iv. In Thomas’s (1976) terms, it is unlikely that styles will be anything other than Competitive or Avoidance. Thus the aim of either party will be to try to force the other one to back down. There is too much to lose for either side to offer collaboration, and although there might be an element of compromise, one party will have to give most of the ground to the other. Although this is highly speculative, in all probability the winner will be the medical staff. It is much easier for them to produce signs that any maladministration in the hospital is the fault of the administrators. Thus they can win a publicity war, to which even the government is sensitive. Indeed, it is fair to say that in Great Britain, the Government is wary of doing battle with the medical profession.
Supplementary Illustrative Materials

Given below is an additional OB in Action feature, which is associated with the material on page 422. This illustrates the idea that although there is a widespread tendency to condemn political activity, it can have positive as well as dysfunctional consequences in organisations. Together with brief notes this is also available on the student Website. Thus it is not necessary to reproduce it, but merely to draw the attention of students to its availability and where to find it.

OB in Action – Organisational Politics: The Essential Lubricant

To mention politics or politicking in many organisations is to invite howls of protest and inevitable condemnation. Because the traditional view of organisations is that they are entities that operate in a logical, predictable and rational way, political manoeuvring is popularly supposed to be unnecessary and is condemned as downright harmful. There is however, another view, which is that internal politics is not only inevitable, but something that has immense benefits for an organisation because without a degree of political activity crucial decisions might never be made.

One expert who takes this view is Dr David Butcher of Cranfield University Business School, who advances the view that organisational politics is a very necessary activity. He argues there are very few ‘one best solutions’ to organisational problems. Usually there are several potential solutions to a problem, each of which is the property of some interest group. In most organisations however, there is a persistent difficulty in identifying these solutions because there is often no facility for them to come into the open, where they could be examined and compared. Therefore, politics with its inevitable lobbying and building-up of temporary alliances or coalitions can perform the vital function of getting a solution that is acceptable to the widest number of people into the limelight, where it can be adopted. Viewed this way, far from being an illegitimate activity, politics can be very necessary and far from harmful. It is what actually makes things happen.

A word of warning though; old attitudes die hard, and the traditional view of organisations, which holds that politics is illegitimate and unnecessary is very resilient. As such, while using politics can be very necessary, it can often be wise to pretend that the traditional rules of the game are still being followed.

**Assessment Materials**

**Assignment Questions**

**Question 1**

Across the last decade a number of significant changes have taken place in the structural forms and functioning of organisations. For instance, downsizing and delayering have been commonplace. Schemes of empowerment have been introduced and processes such as Total Quality Management have been widely adopted. Using appropriate research evidence on conditions in these newly reconstructed organisations, critically assess whether these are likely to make the use of political tactics more commonplace than in traditional organisations.

**Question 2**

Critically evaluate the proposition that there is an optimum level of conflict for an organisation.

**Examination questions**

**Question 1**

What is organisational politics, to what extent is it likely to be a prevalent activity in organisations and what are the ethics of using political tactics?

**Question 2**

Compare and contrast different philosophies on organisational conflict and explain which, if any, of these can be reconciled with the distinction that is sometimes made between functional and dysfunctional conflict.
Suggested Marking Framework for Assessment Materials

Assignment questions

Question 1

This question requires the student to do two things. First, to carefully research and evaluate appropriate evidence about conditions in current organisations, i.e. those that have been reconstructed using some of the initiatives given in the question. Second, to evaluate whether these conditions are such that they are likely to give rise to an increased level of political activity. These two parts should each qualify for 40 per cent of the total marks, with a further 20 per cent for the quality of literature used.

Be prepared to fail answers to the first part if they merely regurgitate what is given in Chapter 2 as a faithful picture of current conditions. This information should be a starting point for the gathering of suitable evidence. Bare pass answers will consider only one of the initiatives (probably TQM) in detail. Better answers will point out that current initiatives tend to result in organisations where clear-cut rules that define responsibilities are less prevalent, spans of control are wider and there is probably a great deal more ambiguity, all of which means that people are supervised less, and have the opportunity to redefine their own roles. In addition there is often a requirement for a greater intensification of effort, and some evidence of people’s disenchantment with the conditions, together with a great deal of insecurity. Thus the conditions are rife for more political activity.

The second part of the question requires a careful comparison of the conditions with the factors likely to give rise to political activity. These are clearly stated in the book and so it should be obvious what is required. Be prepared to fail students who do not make this comparison. Bare pass answers will deal with matters in a general way and better or good answers will give an item by item comparison.

Question 2

This question only requires the student to address a single issue: an evaluation of the implications of the interactionist perspective for organisational conflict. As such, it is relatively straightforward and marks for the answer crucially depend on the quality of argument given.

Be prepared to fail students who do not address the key issue (critical evaluation) but simply regurgitate the different philosophies about conflict given in the book. Bare pass answers will simply mention the implication of an optimal level of conflict for an organisation and some of the theoretical pitfalls of having too little or too much conflict. Better answers will point out that while the idea of an optimum level is theoretically plausible, there are huge problems in identifying what is ‘optimum’. Good answers will draw attention to the distinction between functional and dysfunctional conflict, and point out that while there is probably an optimum level for the former, the latter type of conflict can be problematic whatever its level.
Examination Questions

Question 1

The answer to this question should address three issues, which qualify respectively for up to 20, 40 and 40 per cent of the total marks.

First, the expression ‘organisational politics’ should be defined. Since a clear definition is given on page 418 of the book, this should be straightforward and a repetition of the definition should qualify for a bare pass. Better or good answers to this part will expand on the definition by drawing out some of its implications, i.e. that politics is conceptually different from power; it occurs in situations of uncertainty; it involves descensus about choices.

The second issue concerns the extent to which political activity is prevalent in organisations. Bare pass answers will simply acknowledge that it is prevalent. Better answers will cite Mintzberg’s (1985) argument that the conditions prompting its use are virtually inevitable in organisations. Good answers will cite the empirical evidence of Gandz and Murray (1980) which demonstrate its widespread use.

The third issue requires reference to the Cavanagh et al. (1981) decision tree and since a clear indication of this is given in the question, be prepared to fail answers to this part if they ignore the material. Bare pass answers will state the essential ideas embodied in the decision tree, without giving details. Better answers will accurately replicate the tree, and good answers will state some of the criticisms of the tree given in the text.

Question 2

This is a very straightforward question that requires the student to address three issues: to state the major philosophies on organisational conflict given in the text; compare and contrast the philosophies; explain whether they can be reconciled with the concepts of functional and dysfunctional conflict. These should qualify respectively for up to 35, 35 and 30 per cent of the total marks.

The first issue requires a brief but accurate re-statement of the unitarist, pluralist, radical and interactionist philosophies. For the second issue, to compare and contrast the philosophies, students should be able to show where the philosophies have similarities as well as differences. Bare pass answers will simply distinguish between unitarism and the remainder, all of which have something in common. That is, unitarism reflects a belief that all conflict is bad, whereas the others accept that it is inevitable, but for different reasons. Better/good answers will point out that the closest match is between pluralist and interactionist ideas, both of which see a positive function for conflict. Indeed, the interactionist perspective is really a more refined version of pluralism.

The third issue requires a consideration of the Robbins (1974) classification of functional and dysfunctional conflict re-stated in the book. Fail students who do not actually try to reconcile the different philosophies with the Robbins scheme, but simply regurgitate the scheme, i.e. resolve dysfunctional conflicts and stimulate functional conflict where necessary. Bare pass answers will make the point that this view is only compatible with pluralist (slightly) or interactionist ideas. Better/good answers will point out that while the Robbins scheme acknowledges a positive role for conflict, it is still couched in unitarist terms. For instance it speaks of resolving or stimulating conflict for the good of the organisation, and this can all too easily mean resolving or stimulating to serve the aims of a single (management) group.
Multiple Choice Questions

NOTE: When using these questions, it is advisable to precede them with the general instructions given in the introduction to this manual.

1. Power is the ability to:
   a. compel somebody to do something
   b. persuade somebody to do something
   c. extract compliance
   d. all of the above

2. If I comply with someone’s wishes because of the negative consequences of not doing so, I am responding to:
   a. referent power
   b. coercive power
   c. expert power
   d. reward power

3. If someone receives power because of his/her position in the formal organisational hierarchy, this is:
   a. referent power
   b. reward power
   c. legitimate power
   d. expert power

4. A person who has power because he or she has personal traits or characteristics that are admired by others has:
   a. referent power
   b. reward power
   c. legitimate power
   d. expert power

5. Which of the following is NOT a contextual use of power?
   a. having resources
   b. being a member of a network
   c. the ability to confer rewards on people
   d. knowledge or information

6. Power tactics refer to:
   a. how to use the bases of power
   b. the sources of power
   c. who is manipulated
   d. none of the above

7. The most frequently employed power tactic used by managers to influence subordinates is:
   a. coalitions
   b. bargaining
   c. rationality
   d. friendliness
8. Activities designed to acquire, develop and use power within an organisation can be described as:
   a. self-development
   b. coercion
   c. human resource management
   d. political behaviour

9. The more that an organisation has ____________ the more likely it is that people can use political behaviour.
   a. authoritarian management
   b. subjective appraisal criteria
   c. unfair payment systems
   d. none of the above

10. Which of the following is NOT a condition that is likely to result in political behaviour?
    a. organisational change
    b. low trust
    c. scarce resources
    d. clear and unambiguous individual targets

11. According to Mintzberg (1985), which of the following most accurately describes the frequency with which conditions that give rise to political behaviour exist in organisations?
    a. virtually universal
    b. rarely
    c. the conditions occasionally arise
    d. none of the above

12. Which of the following is NOT a question suggested by Cavanagh et al (1981) that needs to be asked to decide whether the use of politics is ethical?
    a. does the action result in optimal stakeholder satisfaction?
    b. will the action result in respect for the rights of individuals?
    c. is the action legal?
    d. will the action result in a natural justice situation?

13. Which of the following is NOT a political tactic given in the text?
    a. using outside experts
    b. controlling information flows
    c. controlling agendas
    d. using coercion on subordinates

14. Conflict is a process that arises when:
    a. two parties are in competition
    b. one party purposely blocks the goal achievement of another
    c. one party suspects that the other is politicking
    d. none of the above
15. The unitarist philosophy on conflict argues that conflict:
   a. is a necessary evil
   b. is natural and cannot be avoided
   c. is an aberration to be avoided at all costs
   d. can have a useful function

16. The pluralist philosophy on conflict argues that it is:
   a. to be avoided at all costs
   b. is good and is always to be encouraged
   c. the biggest time waster in organisations
   d. a perfectly natural phenomenon

17. According to the interactionist view:
   a. so long as it is handled through proper channels, conflict is not harmful
   b. conflict is to be stamped out if possible, but tolerated if not
   c. there is an optimum level of conflict for a group or organisation
   d. conflict should always be encouraged.

18. According to Robbins (1974) conflict should be stimulated in all the following circumstances except where:
   a. people are stagnant or complacent
   b. it results in pursuit of group/individual rather than organisational goals
   c. groups consider co-operation more important than performance
   d. change is needed to revitalise the organisation

19. The conflict handing orientation that reflects the maximum degrees of assertiveness and co-operation is:
   a. collaboration
   b. compromise
   c. accommodation
   d. avoidance

20. Which of the following is NOT a conflict stimulation method?
   a. communication
   b. altering organisational structure
   c. bringing in outside individuals
   d. compromise
## Answers to Multiple Choice Questions

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