



Conflict Resolution Tips - Dealing With Politics in Resistance to Change Management

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Perspectives on politics vary. There is the negative view, which sees politics as the exercise of personal power used for personal gain and at the other end of the spectrum the positive view, that sees politics as a social power used to create motivation or to accomplish group goals.

Nevertheless whether you are aware of it or not, and regardless of whether you understand it or not, in corporate life (and especially in the UK - where I live and work) the political dimension is all-important.

The higher your contacts are up the ladder, within an organisation, the greater the extent to which the political dimension is important.

At director level, in all large organisations, the political dimension can shape the decision making process very considerably and will often be the major determining factor.

Personal power in an organisational context can be described as the ability to influence another person to do what you want, when and how you want them to do it without having to alter your own behaviour in ways you don't want to.

Symbols of political power and influence include things such as: early access to critical and "insider" information; being sought out for an opinion by senior people; getting favoured people into jobs; exercising control of key resources and influencing an agenda.

Sources of power cover a wide spectrum: legitimate power - based on position, appointment and contract; coercive power - the means to force someone to do something; referent power - based on charisma and the power of personality; expert power - based on knowledge and specialist expertise; and information power - as the source of critical information.

Influence can be described as the process of changing in some way the thoughts, perspective, behaviour and feelings of another person.

Politics in an organisational context is the use of power and influence. It has been said that politics is simply how power gets worked out on a practical day-to-day basis.

Understand the political self-interest of the individuals and groups you are dealing with is therefore essential in implementing change, as at its most fundamental level effective change management involves trade-offs in order to be lasting.

How to deal with resistance created or exacerbated by political factors

- Get ahead of the game by undertaking some form of early political assessment as part of your cultural analysis and mapping of informal personal networks



- Do not wait until a political issue becomes critical, as this point it will have gained momentum, and it is probably going to be too late.
- Do not take action to quash resistance but only to accomplish a positive goal. This may of course mean sidelining, removing or replacing deeply resistant individuals. This is a serious and important point, as there will always be people who will resist change to the death. The tendency is to expend a lot of energy trying to get them on side. John Kotter says: "Forget it, get rid of them, no matter who they are in terms of power or relationship to you because if you let them inside the tent they will do so much damage they will undermine the change."

Here are some practical "hands on" strategies for dealing with politics in resistance to change management

- Focus on the specifics and details of the transactional aspects of the work. When people are focused on actually doing the work, they have far less time and energy for engaging in politics.
- Focus your attention on the "bread and butter" basic, standard transactional aspects that do not involve "specials" and "exceptions". This will mean that you do not need to involve the "expert" assistance or knowledge of the "queen bee" political movers and shakers.
- Isolate and group together all your "specials", "exceptions", work-arounds and non-standard transactions for the attention of "special ones" those you have identified as political movers and shakers - or as they like to see themselves - the "queen bees".
- Take advantage of the increased opportunities to build relationships and communicate with people as you engage with them on the specifics and details of the transactional aspects of actually doing the work.
- As a guiding principle, always remember that politics is a practice - it's all about reaching mature compromises, developing relationships and getting results; always draw a distinction between the people and the problem; focus on interests, not positions; always seek options for mutual gain; and always apply objective criteria.