

Thinking in Action

objectives. It models the sort of treatment that you want public servants to emulate in their dealings with citizens. It fosters the empowerment of others. And it makes organizational life a more pleasant experience for everyone involved. Being nice not only is the good and right thing to do for its own sake but also is a good political strategy.

The following exercises will help you to think through some of the questions we have raised concerning power and politics.

Politics and MBO: A Case Study

John was thrilled when, after completing his MPA degree, he was hired to work as a management analyst in the state office of management and budget. During his first year on the job, John impressed his supervisor and coworkers with his excellent analytical and writing skills. Even though his time on the job was short, he had proved himself to be an intelligent, hard-working, and reliable employee. At his 1-year performance review, he received an "excellent" overall rating.

Shortly after his 1-year anniversary on the job, a new governor was sworn into office. She had many innovative ideas and changes that she wanted implemented to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of state government. One of the vehicles she instituted to achieve these changes was the introduction of a statewide "management by objectives" (MBO) program to be administered out of John's office. Although John was relatively inexperienced, the unit director believed that his excellent work qualified him to serve as the coordinator for the MBO program for all social service and education programs. Two other staff members were assigned to split the remaining functional areas of state government including transportation, natural resources, staff departments (e.g., purchasing, personnel), and so on. But social service and education programs were the new governor's top priority and were expected to receive the most attention.

It was John's job to help the agencies to develop goals and objectives and set up data collection strategies to obtain information on performance against those goals. He was to personally advise the governor on the progress of the MBO program on a periodic basis and to make a formal presentation with agency officials to the governor's office four times a year. John quickly learned that achieving agency cooperation was going to be very difficult. The agency representatives he worked with were openly hostile to the ideas of measurable objectives, did not get reports completed on time, and were generally uncooperative with the effort. These agency staff viewed John as an inexperienced, naive, and intense young man who presented an

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organizational annoyance that probably would disappear in time. Although the agency heads were publicly supportive of the program, John was finding it nearly impossible to work with agency staff to complete his tasks.

In response, John attempted to coerce the agency staff to cooperate, threatening to "expose" them and punish them (and their agency) for their lack of support and involvement. When he had his first meeting about the MBO program with his supervisor, he expressed his outrage at how difficult and obstinate the agency representatives were as well as anger at his mistreatment and the lack of respect he was being shown. He dismissed his supervisor's suggestions about how he might develop a more cooperative positive working relationship with the agency representatives, saying that they were simply "dead-wood" in the bureaucracy and should be fired. "The governor wants this, this is the right approach to take, and if they aren't going to cooperate, I say they should be fired," he said. Shortly thereafter, John was reassigned to an internal, lower priority project.

Respond to the following questions.

1. What do you think has happened here? Who, and in what way, are the various participants responsible for the outcome? How does John's experience relate to questions of organizational power and politics?
2. Assuming that, after his reassignment, John might have become more open to suggestions on his behavior, how might you advise him?
3. If you were John and had the benefit of hindsight, how might you have handled the situation differently? How could you use power and organizational politics to gain the respect and cooperation you need to accomplish the governor's objectives?

Observing Organizational Politics

1. Think of the most effective and successful organizational politician you know. From what sources of power does this person draw?
2. What strategies does this person employ? What strategies have been the most effective and why?
3. Are these strategies used constructively to enhance organizational goal attainment? Are these strategies used for self-serving purposes? Explain.
4. Do you have power relative to this person? Why or why not? Do you need or want more power in this case? If yes, then what are some of the ways in which you might increase your influence and power?
5. What can you learn from this person that will help you to gain power and use it constructively for your own benefit and for the organization's benefit? (In some cases, this might involve learning from behavior and strategies that you want to avoid rather than emulate.)