

# The Art of Influence: Engaging in Political Behavior

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# Session Overview

- What is planned change?
  - Resistance to change
- Political Behaviors
- John Kotter's Eight-Step Model
- Political Model/Perspective
- Dissertation Findings
  - Mid-level administrators, senior-level administrators, and presidents
- Insights on How to be More Politically Adept

# My Goal for This Session

- To increase your knowledge about how to:
  - proactively influence others,
  - think more strategically, and
  - lead with purpose during the change process.



# Identify Your Beliefs About Change

- When it comes to making changes, most employees...
- When it comes to making changes, most managers...
- People disagree about whether people are able to change. I believe...
- People resist change because...
- The most difficult thing about managing/leading change is...

# What is Change?

- The **process** or condition of becoming different between time 1 and time 2, and the **product** of tensions between oppositions (Morgan, 1986).
- Change does not take place in a vacuum because it involves real people who bring emotions, hopes, and expectations with them (Kotter, 1995).

# What is a Change Initiative?

Any conceptualized change that has been introduced by a college administrator into the organization with the intention that the organization will **adjust** its **strategies** and **processes** to correspond with the **desired change**.



# Change Has Multiple Meanings

- “We can control change”
  - Organizational development
  - Continuous improvement
- “We have no control over change”
  - Change happens to us
  - “Wave of the future”

# To Change or Not to Change?

- Change (movement) vs. stability (constancy)
- The more we pursue change, the less constancy we have, and vice versa.
- Organizations want a measure of permanence





# Resistance to Change

- Threatens some valued self-interest
- Implies criticism and threatens self-esteem
- Outcomes are often uncertain
- Frequency, or “flavor-of-the-month” response
- Change managers/leaders are not trusted
- People lose their jobs

(Cheney et al., 2004)

# People Embrace Change If They Perceive...

- The intended change as worthwhile
- Achieving something they value
- The change as likely to be effective
- Accomplishing what's intended
- They can be successful in doing their part
- The amount of effort required of them personally is reasonable
- If they try and fail, the consequences are manageable
- If they try and succeed, they'll be recognized and rewarded in a way that's valued

# Remember That...

- Resistance to change isn't necessarily a bad thing
- Often the concerns and fears that lead people to resist changes are valid
- Understanding the fears and work hard to alleviate them

(Julius, Baldrige, & Pfeffer, 1999)

# Discussion Questions

- What words come to mind when you hear the term “political behavior?”
- What does it mean to be politically savvy?
- Rate yourself (1-10) on your political “savvy-ness.” Why this rating?
- What can you do to develop political acumen?

# Political Behaviors Defined

- Routinely occurring or episodic actions or tactics undertaken by higher education administrators **to influence the behavior and attitudes of others in a pre-determined direction.**
- Commonly known as influence tactics

(Lichtenberg, 1998; Pfeffer, 1981; Reardon, 2004; Vigoda, 2003)

# Examples of Political Behaviors

- Agenda setting
- Bargaining
- Coalition Forming
- Coercing
- Collaboration
- Consulting
- Explaining
- Managing Conflict
- Manipulating
- Motivating
- Negotiating
- Networking
- Partnering
- Persuading
- Problem solving
- Relationship building
- Rewarding
- Role modeling

(Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Yukl, 2002).

# Leadership is Influence

Influence is the power or capacity of causing an effect or effects in indirect or intangible ways (Cialdini, 2001).



# Politics 101

- Politics is the messy process of getting stuff done.
- People tend to do what's in their best interests.
- Politics helps advance careers.
- Politics is a game—a game of shrewdness and mindfulness.
- Power is at the heart of politics and may indeed **be** the heart of politics.
- Engaging in political behavior is a skill.
- “If you do not love politics, then you will not accomplish much.” Tom Peters



# Choice to Engage?

Whether it is coordinating, organizing or innovating, performing these activities inevitably requires college administrators to engage in political behaviors (or influence tactics) with different stakeholders.

(Pusser, 2004; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974; Schriesheim & Neider, 2006; Vigoda, 2003)

# Research Question

What do community college leaders believe are the **most effective influence tactics** when leading planned organizational change?

What **kinds of influence tactics** do community college administrators engage in when leading planned organizational change?

# Planned Organizational Change

Change that is brought about through the **purposeful and intentional efforts** by higher education administrators to modify organizational goals, academic priorities, authority structures, and program activities as opposed to change that is due to environmental or uncontrollable forces.

(Creamer & Creamer, 1988)

# John Kotter's Eight Step Model

- 1: Establish a sense of urgency
- 2: Form a powerful coalition
- 3: Create a vision to accomplish the desired end-result
- 4: Communicate the vision
- 5: Empower others to act on the vision
- 6: Plan for and create short-term wins
- 7: Consolidate improvements and change what's not consistent with the vision
- 8: Institutionalize the new approaches

# Political Model/Perspective

- Victor Baldrige, Henry Mintzberg, Jeffrey Pfeffer, Robert Birnbaum, Lee Bolman, Terrence Deal, Alison Chaffee, etc.
- As a political system, a higher education institution in essence is a **coalition** composed of individuals and sub-coalitions who are **interdependent**, have **divergent interests** and preferences, and **compete** for influence and **scarce resources**.

# Political Model/Perspective

- Central idea: Goals and agreements emerge out of a bargaining process among coalition members.
- To achieve desired organizational outcomes, administrators must spend time building positions that are supported by other groups as well.

# Sample

- 3 public community colleges
  - Suburban; comprehensive; 10,000+ enrollment
- 48 administrators
  - 3 presidents
  - 27 senior-level administrators
  - 18 mid-level administrators
- Interviews conducted from October to December 2007

# Mid-Level Administrators

- Collaborate to Build Consensus
- Involve Faculty and Incorporate Their Input





# Build Relationships

Relationships are what get you in the door and relationships are what give you credibility. I think that's the key. The data is going to sell itself, you know. But if you have the relationships and the trust and the credibility, that's what influences people and that's what sells things. **Influencing is really based on relationships and credibility—and that takes time.** That's probably why change takes time—you got to build credibility, you got to have relationships with folks.

(MLA1 – C)

# Explain to Increase Understanding

Explaining to people is something that I do often. Instead of sending an email that X is down, I'd tell them why it is doing that. **People are much more tolerant if they understand**...some people don't care if people understand. And that's how the two previous directors were—they didn't care if they had buy-in. Their attitude was “we're going to do this and you're going to like it.” They had a very poor approval rating because of it.

(MLA3 – A)

# Ingratiate Genuinely

What I found to have worked is to say, “You’re the expert on this, not me, so you need to tell me how you think this could work better.” The second you call somebody an expert, what do you think that does to their self-esteem? **It makes them feel good.** Now, it has to be genuine because clearly there is a difference.

(MLA2 – H)

# Build a Case by Doing Homework

I feel like a lawyer sometimes—I'm always **building a case before I bring any idea forward**, especially with faculty. I've learned to build my case and I do that a lot here. I build my case carefully when working with staff and faculty by doing my homework. And faculty is the hardest sell.

(MLA3 – A)

# Sell Ideas to Get Buy-In

I couched my proposal by saying, “Doing it this way, you won’t have to worry about doing these other things. You can concentrate on what you do best.” **As their new leader, I needed to build consensus** with this group about how this new organizational structure could work without sweeping with a new broom because in a unionized environment, you just can’t come in and do that. I had to work with the cards that were dealt to me and assign people to where I felt they were going to best serve.

# Align Change With College Mission

I always try to give due diligence in analyzing the problem so that when I go to the level above me, I anticipate the questions they are going to ask and prepared answers ahead of time...If I can align it with the goal or mission of the college and I can portray and show that it's in their best interest, then **they can see that change as a welcomed change, not something to resist.**

# Senior-Level Administrators

- Be Patient and Persistent
- Anticipate Resistance



# Doing What's Best for the Organization

I learned a long time ago that there comes a point in time where you just don't beat your head against the wall. I'm not here to do what I want to do or what I think is right. I'm here to do what's good for the organization and what the organization wants me to do.

(SLA3 – A)



# Observe to Learn the Politics

When I came here, I watched people. I didn't like having three meetings for one thing but I had to learn some patience...and understand it was an educational need and that there was no way I was going to break that until I understood what was going on. I needed to get an understanding why these things happen and not consider it to be a waste of time...So I start to figure out how to use this time, what's going on in these meetings and these places. Do I speak first, do I speak last? It's who's in the room and what's going on and **I have to figure that out in order to affect some change.**

# Build Awareness by Involving Key Players

In higher education what will not work is telling people what to do...You've got to build awareness of what the problem is, you got to get a group together. **Telling people what to do is just a bad idea if you really want systemic, sustained change.** You have to involve the supervisors, the first and second level managers because they can sabotage it so easily.

(SLA3 – A)

# Know When the Timing Is Not Right

I have an idea that I want to implement but I can see that it might not work here because it would create a lot of problems for the board and the unions. And so I've got to **calculate this bigger picture into my thought process.**

(SLA3 – A)

# Build a Case to Get Buy-In

When I approach a project, I build a campaign. I'm **building a case to get agreement**, and I will consciously identify the landscape—who is it that I have to influence, what shareholders do I have, who's invested in what I'm going to do or could be invested, and how do I articulate that? There's nothing scientific about how I begin to approach people—it's really by relationship and feel. If I look at the individuals I need to speak with, certain ones are more critical than others so those are the ones I need to meet first.

(SLA1 – G)

# Make Subtle, Incremental Changes

You have to chop it up into smaller digestible pieces that are affordable (both in terms of money and manpower), that can be measured, that takes you to the next step and so on. You might have in your mind a complete and total transformation, but if you have an institution that is objecting to change or slow to change, you have to **make it look like it's not changing much**. And eventually you roll it up into a larger program.

(SLA1 - G)

# Presidents

- Educate Others About Current Realities and Challenges
- Respect Others Regardless of Their Roles



# Build Consensus

One of the first things I do to convey the message of change is to bring people together. And I couldn't force the message on them. I have to let them see for themselves and get them to feel comfortable with what we need to do. A lot of times I don't ask for votes. I want to know if people feel comfortable. That's a key one. **Do you feel comfortable with the direction we're going?** That's more of a consensus rather than a yes-no or a win-lose.

(P3)

# Perform and Fulfill the Presidential Role

When people say to me that I need to talk to this group about so and so, I'd say sure, what is it you want me to talk about? In other words, I'll fulfill the role if you want me to talk on this subject or that subject, if you want me to play this role, that's fine. I need to find out what it is. Again, I'm **fulfilling the role that comes with being a president.**

(P3)



# Negotiate for Win-Win

You have to work hard at trying to give people what they want without hurting yourself. That works most of the time, not guaranteed but again everybody gets the feeling that they've won something out of the process. That's what you work hard to do—to make everybody feel like there's a little win there because the losers will stay on your back forever...you **don't want to have people out there with a sense of being a loser.**

# Recognize Timing When Taking Action

...you learn that it takes time for people to digest information and direction, it takes time for people to change. It also takes time for situations to clarify themselves. My new favorite saying is a twist on an old saying, “Don’t just stand there, do something.” My new favorite saying is “Don’t just do something, stand there.” It means every now and again, you just have to look at it for awhile; make sure that you do **understand exactly what you are looking at before you take action.** I think that’s been probably the most profound learning.

# Sell the Vision

I believe that well-intentioned people—when given the same amount of information—will generally come up with the same conclusions. One of the reasons we disagree is because we maybe don't have the same level of understanding about what it is we're discussing. So one of my change strategies is to **provide people with as much information**, maybe call it intelligence, about the circumstances. I'm hopeful that they'll begin to move toward where I would like them to go on their own volition because of their own understanding.

(P2)

# Give People Authority & Responsibility

I'm going to give you the authority to do the job in the manner you think it has to be done given the values of the organization and the timelines that we talked about. I **can't be stepping in and managing day-to-day operations**. You have the right and authority to do things, but here are the upper and lower limits. If you stay within that, OK. But if you go out of it, then let's start checking one way or the other. And is that clearly defined, no. But there are certain expectations.

(P2)

# Practice Implications

- Influencing others boils down to:
  - Communicate often and openly
  - Build relationships
  - Get buy-in
  - Do homework to provide evidence/data
  - Involve others
- Three salient concepts emerged

# “Role Performing”

Having the willingness and professionalism to perform functional responsibilities associated with the role.



# If Not Me, Who?

My job is to understand and fulfill the expectations of a president to the best of my ability and to not get caught up that I'm the president. I'm sorry, that's just a role you're playing. It's a short period of time you're doing that. And then turn it over. So **don't get your ego involved in it.** But that's hard to do, it's hard to do.

(P3)

# “Calculated Patience”

Having the patience and wisdom to know when to wait, when to act, and when to plant seeds.





# If Not Now, When?

You have to recognize that there are these “opportunity times.” It’s not a good time to present certain things. **There are other things going on and you have to be aware of them.** You know that at this time, there’s nothing that’s going to get it approved. So I use a method that I call “planting the seed.” I just put it over there and then I’ll water it every now and then. I’m two years down the road, I know this is going to take two years, I know my passion wants it to happen now but I know it’s going to take awhile. I have to know that and I have to have some patience.

(SLA3 – B)

# “Anticipatory Thinking”

Having the foresight and mindfulness to anticipate how others will react and be able to respond with tact and logic.



# What's Next?

We have a very pro-labor governing board. So there isn't a decision we make here that isn't somewhat filtered through a collective bargaining lens. First question, what should we be doing? Second, how will the unions react to this? And the unions, unfortunately, supersede student interest. While every one of us at this college says we're a student-centered organization, learning-centered organization, that's a lie. **We're an employee-centered organization that is in the business of learning.** We just are.

# Insights on How to Be More Politically Adept

- Influence is critical so cultivate it one person at a time
- Mastering influence is a matter of knowing how to position ideas effectively, how to time the delivery of those ideas, and how to select the right communication channel
- Make yourself and your ideas memorable
- Accurately read between the lines

# Insights on How to Be More Politically Adept

- Identify and understand both your own political style and that of those around you lies at the heart of political success
- Think like a chess player
- Identify possible objections and deal with them before they become hardened positions
- Manage reciprocity
- Give credits even when it's not due

# Closing Thought

I think people have to understand where you're coming from and why you think it's important. And frankly, **they have to understand what's in it for them.** That's the reality of our society today. You have to educate them on what you want to accomplish. Make sure that if there are any barriers that could have an impact that those are addressed upfront. If you're going to work on this project and you want to influence people to think that this is the way this project needs to go, you need to educate them on what it's going to accomplish, how do you think you'll get there, and what obstacles you're going to face.

(MLA2 – H)

# Question & Answer

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