Effective Leadership of Sport Organizations through Political Astuteness

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Introduction

It is the sport leader's responsibility to emphasize the best interest of the sport organization by ensuring that it is positioned to meet its organizational goals. Managing organizational politics in a way that supports organizational achievement requires political astuteness on the part of the sport leader. A goal of the sport leader should be to minimize organizational politics, given its potentially detrimental affects to the productivity of the organization. After the sport leader accepts the ubiquitous nature of politics in organizations, he/she must understand it, accept that notion that employee perceptions of it varies, and be acutely aware of its potentially negative effect on the outcomes of the organization. After the sport leader fully understands the facets of organizational politics he/she will be adequately prepared to implement effective approaches to minimizing it in the interest of the productivity of the sport organization.

Objective

The sport leader's astuteness to the politics of the sport organization is a necessary component of effective sport leadership. The goal of this presentation is to provide an overview of the organizational politics literature for the purpose developing recommendations to sport leaders that will help improve their astuteness of organizational politics in the sport organization.

How this Work Adds to the Field

Original recommendations have been drawn from the literature and provided, to help the sport leader navigate the politics within sport organizations. This work not only provides original recommendations for the sport leader in navigating organizational politics but also, through the presentation of organizational politics literature, provides knowledge from which insights to organizational politics can be developed and used to help achieve positive sport organization outcomes. The original recommendations, together with various additional management strategies, support the advancement of organizational politics knowledge available to sport leaders.

Key Knowledge Related to Organizational Politics

Key knowledge related to organizational politics helps provide insight to sport leaders as they aspire to lead in a way that supports the organizational mission by meeting specific goals and objectives of their sports teams. The original recommendations supporting effective sport leadership through political astuteness are based, in part, on understanding and accepting that politics in organizations is inevitable and, therefore, must be addressed; knowing that perceptions of politics vary across members of organizations; and being aware of the serious negative repercussions/outcomes often caused by organizational politics.

Leadership and the Inevitability of Organizational Politics

Leadership is a process that influences activity in a group and is directed toward the achievement of one or several objectives (Eliyana, 2010); and, politics requires attention from the sport leader because, as pointed out by Ram and Prabhakar (2010), "Organizational politics is an inescapable and intrinsic reality" (p. 41). Colignon (1997) claimed that organizations are not fixed objects within environments but are constituted within social networks that attempt to outflank each other. Informal, typically divisive, illegitimate and neither sanctioned by formal authority, certified expertise, or accepted ideology were phrases used by Mintzberg (1983) to describe organizational politics. Organizational politics is an important ingredient of organizational life, which refers to behavior in which personal interests are safeguarded rather than organizational interests (Kacmar & Baron, 1999; Malik, Danish, & Ghafoor, 2009; Mintzberg, 1983).

Varied Perceptions of Sport Organization Politics

Persons employed in and affiliated with sport organizations often perceive politics within the organization differently. An experienced person may frequently deem what a less experienced person believes to be politics as legitimate organizational behavior (Conner, 2006). In sport organizations, experienced persons may not be as quick to judge organizational behavior as political but may, instead, see those behaviors as necessary for the organization to continue to function.

Politics' Negative Influence on Organizational Outcomes

Potential problems and damage that organizational politics brings to a sport organization are many. Politics in sport organizations can lead directly to negative organizational outcomes in the form of: individuals acting in ways to serve their own interests, a negative overall perception of the organization, employee behavior not in the best interest of the organization, and a decline in individual moral behavior that ultimately can lead to a decline in the collective moral of the organization.

Self-serving interests. Sport organization employees, who behave in a manner that reinforces their self-serving political interest may: manipulate and influence at the expense of others, circumvent the chain of command, lobby supervisors, sabotage co-workers, gossip, spread rumors, choose not to follow established procedures. Although these actions may serve the personal agenda of the individual, normally they do not support the mission of the sport organization.

Negative overall perception of the organization. When individuals perceive an organization's political environment as negative, an almost infinite variety of adverse outcomes can result (Conner, 2006). Generally, decreased productivity and an overall organizational inefficiency coming from a decreased commitment to the sport organization can result from politics in the organization. A range of more specific problems from organizational politics might include disciplinary problems, favoritism, feuds, job dissatisfaction, job stress, neglectful workers, power struggles, resistance to needed change, vicious rumors, and turnover. It was revealed by Harris, Harris, & Harvey (2007) that organizational politics can cause members of the organization to feel a great deal of uncertainty and ambiguity because they do not know what actions will be rewarded, punished, or even recognized.

Productivity in sport organizations can be hampered by organizational politics. As Zellars and Fiorito (1999) pointed out, organizational effectiveness is reduced as a result of organizational politics. Respondents in a study conducted by Ram and Prabhaker (2010) found that organizational politics adversely affects involvement at the work place and can dampen the motivation level to a great extent.

Detrimental employee behavior. As a result of organizational politics the following employee behaviors may take place that can be detrimental to the organization: struggle for resources, personal conflicts, competition for power and leadership, building personal stature, controlling access to information, not revealing real intentions, and building coalitions. Additional damage caused by organizational politics in the form of sport employee actions include: withholding information from coworkers, failing to enforce policies and procedures appropriately, using flattery to get favors, shifting blame, and maligning others to make for self-serving purposes.

Decline in moral behavior. For many people, one of the negative connotations of organizational politics is the potential decline of good moral behavior within the organization (Conner, 2006). A decrease in a particular individual's moral behavior can be contagious, leading to a decline in collective morale, which can devastate the productivity of the sport organization.

Recommendations to Minimize Organizational Politics

The following recommendations support the sport leader's efforts to manage with the intent to meet goals of the organization. Preliminary recommendations include: learning the personal agenda's of his/her employees, clarifying and communicating the mission; emphasizing and recognizing employees' personal and professional achievements that support organizational achievement; reinforcing employee actions that take place through established governance structures; learning the personalities, goals, and intents of employees; and governing transparently. Sport leaders might pay special attention to two areas when attempting to minimize organizational politics: (a) behave openly, honestly and void of politics in the area of human resources; (b) and provide honest and quality feedback to employees.

Behave Openly, Honestly, and Void of Human Resources Politics

Research has shown that human resources-related administrative processes (i.e., personnel moves, pay and promotion issues, career development opportunities) are of great concern to employees and important to perceptions of organizational politics (Parker, Dipboye, & Jackson, 1995). Further reinforcing the risk of allowing politics to enter into the area of human resources were the results of a study conducted by Malik, Danish, and Ghafoor (2009), that showed a highly negative correlation between attempts to elevate one's status through general political behavior in the area of pay and promotions and job satisfaction. Sport organization employees will quickly become disgruntled if they perceive politics to play an instrumental role in the human resource process, which will place the collective morale of the organization and subsequent organizational productivity at risk.

Provide Honest and Quality Feedback to Employees

Environments providing higher quality feedback are associated with lower perceptions of organizational politics; whereas, lower perceptions of politics result in higher employee morale (Rosen et al., 2006). Fair practices were found to be a pre-requisite to ensure job satisfaction when implementing organizational policies and decisions involving pay (Ram, & Prabhakar, 2010).

Final Thoughts

Effective exploitation of politics within a sport organization is necessary to maximize its potential to reach organizational goals and objectives. Sport leadership must be proactive in efforts to prevent the encroachment of organizational politics and its subsequent contamination of organizational achievement. The sport leader, in the interest of maximizing organizational achievement, must implement sound approaches to constructively dealing with organizational politics after realizing that is ever-present in organizations.

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