

MBA254

Power and Politics in Organizations

Fall 2013
Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:00-4:00
Room C220 Cheit
Office hours: Tues & Thurs 1:00-2:00 or by appt

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Course description

This course is designed for individuals interested in learning more about the art and science of influence in organizations. Many people are ambivalent, if not disdainful, of those who seek to wield power and influence at work. But organizations are fundamentally political entities, and power and influence are key mechanisms by which things get done.

For aspiring leaders, it is important to be able to diagnose organizational politics in order to form and implement new strategies. In addition, leaders are usually on the receiving end of these processes. An astute leader knows how to anticipate moves that others will make, how to block or avoid them when they have undesirable consequences, and how to help these moves succeed when their consequences are beneficial.

After taking this course, you will be able to: (1) diagnose the true distribution of power in organizations, (2) identify strategies for building sources of power, (3) develop techniques for influencing others, and (4) understand the role of power in building cooperation and leading change in organizations. These skills will be invaluable throughout your career.

Course requirements

You will be evaluated on three types of work: (a) your contributions to class discussions (40%); (b) a final paper (50%); and (c) a brief memo (10%).

Participation (40%)

Much of what you gain from this course will be an exposure to the ideas and insights of other students. As such, it is essential that you come to class prepared to share your perspective with others and to test your analyses against the analyses of your classmates.

With regard to participation, quality counts more than quantity, although some of the latter is necessary to gauge the former. Quality includes, among other things: (1) action recommendations based on rigorous diagnosis; (2) insightful and constructive critiques of others' contributions; (3) integrative comments across cases and/or courses; and (4) so called "stupid questions" no one else is willing to take the risk to ask.

Final paper (50%)

There is no final exam for this course. Instead, there is a paper designed to help you strategize for the next few years of your career (and beyond). It will give you an opportunity to apply the concepts and lessons of this course to your first position after graduation. (Note: If you have not yet secured employment, you can also write the paper about the type of job you will likely take after graduation, or about the different types of jobs you are choosing between. We can discuss various possibilities for a topic.)

Your paper should address the following five questions:

1. What are the power dynamics inherent in your future job?
2. What sources of power and influence will you need to be effective?
3. Do your current sources of power and influence fit the requirements of the job?
4. What are the ethical dilemmas for which you will need to be vigilant?
5. What is your plan for developing the sources of power, influence skills, and partnerships necessary to be effective: (1) before taking the job, (2) during your first months after graduating, and (3) by the end of your first year after graduating?

Final papers should be typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, and be no longer than 10 pages. The paper is due October 4th. Your grade will reflect the breadth and depth of your analysis and the creative insights you offer. Penalties will be exacted for papers that exceed the length limit and/or are late.

It will not be easy to write a paper that adopts a prospective temporal focus. For some of you, how can you analyze a position that you have not yet held? One way to do so is to talk to people who are already there so that you can “get it straight from the horse’s mouth.” As part of this assignment, you are required to conduct three informational interviews with people who are either currently in the position you seek or are qualified to speak about the political environment that surrounds it. You can go about identifying potential interviewees using at least the following two sources: (1) your existing contacts, and (2) the Haas alumni network.

Due: October 10th

****Note:** Again, if you have not settled yet on your post-graduate employment, I am flexible on the topic of the final paper. You can write the paper about the type of job you will likely take, or about the different types of jobs you are choosing between, for example. I want the paper to be maximally useful for you.

Memo (10%)

By September 17th, you will need to draft a memo. I expect this written assignment to be relatively brief (each memo is limited to 2 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font). It is intended to help you reflect and digest the course concepts.

Describe a situation you have faced in your career that relates to a point we discussed in class. I don't want you to regurgitate what we have covered in class. Instead, apply the concepts we have introduced to dissect a particular episode or relationship you now better understand.

The purpose of this memo is to present thoughts and reactions to the material covered in a given class. The memo should be relevant, concise, and extend the analysis of the class material in a useful way. In writing this memo, you should assume that we share the common ground of the class experience and start from there. Don't waste time summarizing the case or the class discussion.

I want to encourage you to think about and apply the material in the class and to force you to organize your thoughts on paper. I find that I understand things much better when I force myself to write them down clearly. I hope this memo will give you an incentive to do this sort of clarifying.

Due: September 17th at the beginning of class

Required course materials

Course reader, which is available on Study.net.

Cialdini, R. B. Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion. New York: William Morrow.

COURSE OUTLINE

I: The Importance of Power and Influence

WEEK 1

Tuesday, August 27th – Introduction to the course

Thursday, August 29th – A profile of the naïve politician

Case: Donna Dubinsky

1. Why was Donna Dubinsky initially successful at Apple Computer? (1981-1984)
2. How and why did things begin to unravel?
3. How did Dubinsky react and why?
4. What should she have done differently?

Video: We will watch a short video in which Donna Dubinsky explains her actions.

Read after this class: Power and Influence: Beyond Formal Authority, Chapters 1 & 2

II: Sources of Power

WEEK 2

Tuesday September 3rd – Reputation and Performance

Case: The Path to Power, Chapters 13 & 16

1. What things did Johnson do to build his reputation?
2. What was Johnson's formal authority? What did he do to obtain more authority?
3. How did Johnson think about effective performance in his job? What did performance mean to him?
4. What strategies did Johnson use to acquire resources useful for exercising power?

Read after
this class: Managing with Power, Chapter 7
Gladwell, Outliers, Chapter 1

Thursday September 5th – Individual Attributes

Case: Lyndon Johnson – Part II

1. What are the sources of power that Johnson possessed or developed?
2. Which personal characteristics and aptitudes did Johnson demonstrate?
3. What structural or cultural sources of power did Johnson have or acquire?

Read after
this class: Managing with Power, Chapter 9
A Primer on Personal Development

WEEK 3

Tuesday September 10th and Thursday September 12th – Resources

Case: The Power Broker, Chapters 10, 11, & 12

1. What were Moses' sources of power?
2. What tactics did Moses use to develop these sources of power?
3. What sources of power did Moses lack? What sources of power did his opponents have? Why weren't they more effective against him?
4. If you had been an opponent of Moses (for instance, a wealthy Long Island land owner, or an upstate Republican), what might you have done to oppose him more effectively?
5. There are many different opinions about Robert Moses. Some hail him as an unselfish hero. Others criticize him for destroying New York's ethnic neighborhoods. What is your opinion? Is Moses a model or a monster?

Video: Excerpts from Rick Burns' "New York"

Read after
this class: Managing with Power, Chapters 4 & 5

WEEK 4

Tuesday September 17th – Networks

Assignment

due: Memo A is due at the beginning of class

Case:

Heidi Roizen

1. What steps did Roizen take, over various jobs, to develop a network? To maintain it?
2. What are the strengths of Roizen's network as we see it at the end of the case? The weaknesses?
3. What suggestions would you give Roizen for adjusting and maintaining her network as she becomes more involved as an Internet venture capitalist?
4. What has made Roizen so successful?

Video:

A conversation with Heidi Roizen

Read after

this class: Informal networks: The company behind the chart

Thursday September 19th – Alliances

Case:

Amelia Rogers at Tassani Communication

1. What is going on here? Why did Burns call Johnson? Why did Johnson call Rodgers?
2. What should Rogers do? Should she speak to Burns? Should she speak to Paglia? (Please be specific about the influence strategy and tactics she should use)

Read after

this class: Managing Strategic Relationships, Chapter 2

III: Exerting Influence

WEEK 5

Tuesday September 24th – Change Management Simulation

Readings: Change Management Simulation Summary
(Read this before today's class)

Exercise: Change Management Simulation

Note: Please bring a laptop or iPad to class if you have one. (It is OK if you do not own a laptop or iPad. We will be grouping you in teams of three and we only need one per team.)

Tuesday September 26th – Using Influence to Lead Change

Debrief: Change Management Simulation

1. Generally speaking, which strategies worked for you in the simulation and which did not?
2. How did the effectiveness of each influence lever depend on the organization's phase? On the individual target's phase?
3. Why did some individuals resist the change more than others?
4. How did you use the social network to your advantage?

Read after this class: The Law of the Few (The Tipping Point)

WEEK 6

Tuesday October 1st – Leaderless group discussion

Exercise: Leaderless group discussion

There is no preparation needed for this session. You will receive materials for the exercise at the beginning of class.

THIS SESSION WILL BE HELD AT THE I-HOUSE. I WILL SEND YOU YOUR EXACT LOCATION VIA EMAIL.

Read after this class: You will receive personalized feedback report and a link to the video of your group discussion on Wednesday, September 12th. Please read the feedback first, then watch the video, by our class on September 13th.

Thursday October 3rd – Interpersonal style

Debrief: Leaderless group discussion

We will debrief the exercise in class. Please be prepared by reading the personalized feedback report and watching the video of your group discussion. You will receive the report and link to the video on September 12th. Please be prepared to address at least the following questions:

1. Were there any surprises in your feedback report? Did watching the video allow you to understand that surprise better?
2. What were some of your strengths in the group discussion in terms of your interpersonal style?
3. What were some areas for improvement in your interpersonal style?

Read after this class: The Power of Talk: Who Gets Heard and Why
Nonverbal Communication

Watch after this class: You will receive a link to a video of your group discussion. Please watch video before next class (you can compare yourself to 12 Angry Men!).

WEEK 7

Tuesday October 8th – Strategies of Persuasion

Case: Twelve Angry Men (the film)

You are required to watch this movie before class. Some of you may have seen the movie before, which focuses on the deliberations of a jury. Our objective in viewing it is to examine the myriad influence strategies used by the protagonist to change the opinions of other jury members and to exercise influence over the group.

1. Why was the Architect able to influence the rest of the jury?
2. What specific influence tactics did the Architect use?
3. What interpersonal style did the Architect adopt in interacting with his fellow jurors?
4. Do you think the Architect made any mistakes in his attempts to persuade the rest of the jury? If so, what were they?

Read after this class: Cialdini, Influence: The psychology of persuasion

Thursday October 10th – The Pitfalls of Power and Course Wrap-Up

Assignment due: The final paper is due at the beginning of class

Discussion: There is no preparation needed for this session. We will discuss how to maintain power over time by avoiding the pitfalls that trip up many powerholders. We will also wrap up the course with a general discussion of power and politics.

Read after this class: The Power Paradox
The Harder They Fall