Corporate Politics 101

Leslie M. Tierstein
STR LLC
Corporate Politics 101

- Overview
  - What is corporate politics?
  - How does it apply to/in an IT environment?
  - How can we use it to our benefit?
Corporate Politics is:

1. the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing government policy
2. competition between interest groups or individuals for power and leadership
3. the total complex of relations between people in society

Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary
Corporate Politics is not:

- The involvement of corporations in politics
- Just for managers
- Survivor
- Dilbert
The Corporation

- Since Corporate Politics involves how you relate to other people, let’s examine a matrix, based on:
  - your position in the organization
  - the positions of the people you’re interacting with in the organization
### The Corporation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YOU</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subordinates</strong></td>
<td>Entry Level Programmer or DBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Superiors</strong></td>
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The Corporation

- Assumptions:
  - All of the people involved work for the same company
  - Permutations of the principles of corporate politics apply to:
    - Sales scenarios
    - Contractors
Entry Level

- Things you need to know because you really are starting out
- General principles that will be valid for your entire corporate career
- Emphasis on being productive and getting along with other people, not with formal power or management
Entry Level

- Know how to interact with your peers
- Know yourself
- “Quadrant-based” personality tests
  - What is your personality type/working style?
  - How do you relate to other personality types?
  - What type of IT job are you best suited for?
    - The Theriault DBA Test (Ⓡ)
Entry Level

- Meyers-Briggs Personality Test/Type Indicator (MBTI)

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<tr>
<th>I/E</th>
<th>N/S</th>
<th>F/T</th>
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<tr>
<td>Introverted/Extroverted</td>
<td>iNtuitive/Sensing</td>
<td>Feeling/Thinking</td>
<td>Judging/Perceiving</td>
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- 4-letter Meyers-Briggs type predicts:
  - Communication styles, problem-solving approach, learning styles, conflict management, etc
Entry Level

- Your subordinates
  - What subordinates?
Entry Level

- Your peers
  - In your division/group
  - In other divisions/groups
  - With the same or different job descriptions

- Interesting Observation:
  - Corporate Organization is reflected in the corporation’s web site
Entry Level

- Your superiors
  - More senior programmers/DBAs
  - Your boss
  - Your boss’s boss

- Communications
  - Open door policy
  - Tierstein’s Rule for Life #1
  - Mushroom Theory of Management
Entry Level

- Know when to get out
  - Project is a “death march”
  - Environment doomed to be disagreeable

- Rules:
  - Bluntness
  - Sarcasm
Corporate politics comes into play, as you assume some management responsibilities

- Ignorance is not bliss
- Corporate Politics is a fact of life

Many of the same principles apply to subordinates, peers, and superiors
### Mid-Level

- **Formal vs Informal Power**
- **Formal Power (conferred by the organization)**
  - Position power
  - Reward power
  - Coercive power

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Mid-Level

- Formal vs Informal Power
- Informal Power (earned, not conferred)
  - Expert power
  - Friendship power
  - Presence power
Mid-Level

- **Deadlines** - Learn to differentiate between fake and real deadlines
  - A real deadline is one which is determined by outside, real-life forces.
  - A “fake” deadline is one instituted by management, or previously agreed to by the implementation team.
Mid-Level

- Real Deadlines
  - Y2K
  - You need to get the rocket turned around by midnight, March 15, or it will crash into the sun.
    - Case history: In September 1999, a rocket crashed into the surface of Mars because of a programming error that had been detected but could not be fixed in time.
  - Year-end, period-end reports
Mid-Level

- "Fake" Deadlines
  - Your manager promised his/her manager, who promised his/her manager
  - Organizational pressures only (not real-world)
Mid-Level

- Fuzzy Deadlines – Some real-life components, usually tempered by financial concerns
  - Tax software/fixes for the next fiscal year
  - The new system replaces a legacy application run by a service bureau. The contract with the service bureau expires on July 31. There is no money allocated for a new contract.
Mid-Level

- Real Deadlines that look fake
  - Fiat: You need to finish this software by March 13.
  - Subtext: Or else we’ll run out of money.
  - Explanation: Mushroom Theory of Management
Mid-Level

● Real Deadlines that look fuzzy
  – You need to finish this software by March 13.
  – Question: The client has lots of money and no pressing need. Why can’t we go back?
  – Answer:
    ● Loss of credibility
    ● Bureaucracy, eg Congressional funding
### Mid-Level

- **Mentoring**
  - Both formal and informal power are involved

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Mid-Level

- Get visibility
  - Get on a new project, using new technology, that is critical to the company’s success
    - How?
      - Tierstein’s Rule for Life #2
    - Have the project succeed
Mid-Level

- Learn to recognize:
  - “Never make any decision you can avoid making.”

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Manager

- Contractors/Consultants
  - Some subordinates and peers may actually be contractors not employees
    - Special concern: non-shared goals
  - Seagull Theory of Using Consultants
    - Benign version
    - Street version
Manager

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obscure pun coming up
Manager

- Original saying (from the 17th [?] century):
  - “Le roi, c’est moi.” (French)
  - “But I’m the king!” (free translation)

- Corporate Politics adaptation:
  - Le roi, c’est ROI. (“ROI rules!”)
  - ROI = Return on Investment
Manager

- Return on Investment:
  - Amount of time to recover investment
    - E-commerce business plan: “4-years to profitability”
  - Percentage return on investment
Manager

- ROI – how is it quantifiable?
  - Replace outsourced (service bureau/ASP) system with custom in-house system
    - Monthly costs vs costs to develop and maintain
  - Acquire new software development tool
    - Acquisition and start-up costs vs reduced expenditures over the product life cycle
Manager

- ROI Examples
  - Investment in a data warehouse/data mart
    - Costs to develop and maintain vs strategic and tactical advantages

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Manager

- Types of decision making
  - Vote
  - Consensus
  - Leader-directed

- When to use each method
Corporate Politics

- Why didn’t they teach me this in school?
- They do teach it
  - American Management Association
  - Dun & Bradstreet Seminars
- They just don’t call it “corporate politics”
  - interpersonal skills, management
  - team building, coaching skills, negotiation
Corporate Politics - Summary

- Learn it
- Use it
- Any questions?
Acknowledgements

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About the Author

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