Power and Influence in Organizations

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Course Description

Power is the ability to get people to do something they did not want to do and make them happy that they did it (Winston Churchill). Power and influence processes are pervasive and important in organizations, and influence is a key mechanism by which things get done. Therefore, you need to be able to understand power and politics, and to act on that knowledge. In short, you need to be not only good technicians, but also good politicians.

This course has four very concrete objectives bearing directly on what you are doing currently:

1) To help you articulate clearly political objectives in your past, current work, or in your next endeavor.

2) To help you map out the political landscape, which you will need to navigate politically in order to attain your political objectives.

3) To understand the bases of power you could have, and whether they are sufficient to attain your political objectives or whether you need to develop more power.
4) To help you develop a concrete political action plan that you could have, or will start implementing, during the course. A plan that specifies, carefully, the political influence tactics you will need to employ to reach your objectives.

**METHOD OF INSTRUCTION**

The course is divided into three sections.

The first section corresponds to the course objectives 1 and 2 above. It is an introduction to the concept of power, to political goals, and to political mapping. Here we explore the circumstances under which power and influence will be more prominent as features of organizational life. We also learn how to identify the relevant people and political subdivisions in an organization and how to diagnose points of view on issues.

The second section corresponds to the course objective 3. We focus on sources of power and why some people have more power than others. We will consider both personal attributes and structural positions in organizations as sources of power.

The third section corresponds to the course objective 4. We consider the strategies and tactics by which power and influence are exercised in organizations, including issues of timing, the use of information and analysis, language, and the social psychology of interpersonal influence.

**METHOD OF EVALUATION**

I will provide graded feedback along three dimensions: 1) on the quality, and to a lesser extent, the quantity of your contributions to class discussion, as well as your performance on a few assignments (20% of the grade); 2) on two memos (each is 15% of the grade); 3) on the quality of a final paper (50% of the grade).

**Class participation**

Class participation is an important part of the learning process in this course, so it is also an important part of your evaluation. Clearly, if you don’t come to class, you can’t participate in the class. In accordance with the EMBA set of rules governing class attendance, I expected you to miss no classes and to alert both the EMBA office, as well as myself, if for causes outside your control; you are going to or have unexpectedly missed a class.

A contribution to class discussion is a comment that: 1) offers a novel and relevant insight to the issue; 2) builds on the preceding discussion and moves the analysis forward to generate new insights; 3) if it includes a personal anecdote or experience, it does so in a way that helps to illuminate the ideas being discussed; and 4) uses logic, evidence, and creativity, and is more than merely an expression of an opinion or feeling.
Reflective Memos Assignments

Memo A corresponds to the class objectives 1 and 2 above. Memo A asks you to consider a challenging political situation that you are currently facing, or think back to a situation in your life when you failed politically. Briefly describe the situation. Then detail your political goals and map the corresponding political landscape.

Memo B corresponds to the class objectives 3 and 4 above. With reference to memo A, memo B asks you to consider what bases of power are (were) available or can be (could have been) developed to suit your goals? Devise a political strategy for using those bases of power to accomplish your goals.

The two memos are for your own benefit. They are short written assignments, intended to help you learn from your current work experience and to apply lessons from this class to your past, current, and future work and careers.

Final Exam

The final paper involves taking Memos A and B and integrating them into a comprehensive plan of action that you should have already begun to implement at work.

Submitting Assignments

I require that you submit Memos A and B via Canvas. Canvas records the date and time of submissions. It is my policy to accept no late assignments without a prior explanation for why the assignment will be late.

I very occasionally make exceptions for tardy assignments if I am notified ahead of time and tardiness is due to circumstances outside of your control. Then I expect you to tell me when you will turn in the assignment at very latest and to meet that revised deadline.

Failure to turn in an assignment to meet a deadline means that the assignment will not be graded and receive feedback, and will not be counted towards your final grade.

COURSE MATERIALS

I recommend getting the book by Jeffrey Pfeffer, Managing with Power, HBS Press. He is the very best and clearest writer on the subject of power and influence. Suggested readings from this book are optional, however.

All other course materials will be posted to Canvas.

STUDENT NORMS OF CLASSROOM CONDUCT
I think that you will find me to be a generally easy going professor who nonetheless articulates and follows through on clear expectations governing class behavior. Along with rules in the student handbook, these are norms and expectations for in-class conduct which I stress, because I believe that if we all follow them, we will create a better learning environment for everyone. In this spirit, if there are expectations and norms of conduct that you think I should add or amend, please speak up.

**Class attendance**

You are expected to attend every class, to arrive on time to class, and to be fully prepared to discuss the material listed in the syllabus in preparation for that class. Missing a class has to be reported to the EMBA office and to the Professor.

Attendance will be taken at every class. I understand that occasionally, because of factors outside of your control, you may be late to class, or you may have to miss a class entirely. If you know of these circumstances in advance, I expect you to notify me and the EMBA office by email of your lateness or absence, as soon as you become aware of these circumstances. If you do not know of these circumstances in advance, I expect that you will explain to me and the EMBA office, as soon as possible after class, why you were late or absent from my class.

**Late assignments**

As indicated above, other than in very rare circumstances, I don't provide feedback on late assignments and I count them as 0 when I calculate your final class grade. Many 0s can result in you failing the class, which is an outcome we would all like to avoid at all costs.

**Name Plates**

Please bring and display your name plate in every class. This, to help me and your classmates learn your name.

**Arriving late to class or absenting oneself in the middle of class**

Many students report being distracted by students trooping in late or disappearing and reappearing at random while class is in session. If you are late, or if you absolutely have to absent yourself during class, I would ask you to do so as quietly and discreetly as possible, to avoid distracting your classmates.

**Use of electronic devices in class**

I expect you to turn off all electronic devices during class: laptops, cell phones, smart-phones, wireless connections, and any other electronic devices. Such devices distract you
and your classmates, and interfere with the flow of class discussion.

**FEEDBACK**

I will provide you feedback for your assignments (and sometimes, discreetly, on your in-class behavior), but I also expect feedback from me to you. Let me explain why.

I love teaching, especially when the class is going well. I am disappointed if there is a problem in the classroom – particularly one that I could have remedied – but nobody brought up the problem or shared the opportunity with me. Please provide me with feedback early and certainly before the end of the semester (whether it be positive or negative) about your learning experience in this class. If there is some aspect of the class that you do not appreciate (and which you think could be improved) or that you appreciate (and which you think there could be more of), please bring this issue to my attention as soon as possible. This, either by speaking with me directly or by relaying the issue through the class representative (I would like someone to volunteer for this role). I guarantee that you will find a sympathetic ear and that I will be very grateful to you for bringing the issue to my attention. I cannot guarantee that I will make every change you suggest. I have learned that making certain changes in the class can satisfy a few students who wanted the change, but dissatisfy the majority of other students who wanted things to remain the same. I do guarantee, however, that I will make every effort to take everyone’s concerns seriously and to do whatever I can to address the issue for the best of everyone in the class.

One last thing; there is the occasional problem with Angel. If you encounter some difficulty in Angel, please begin by trying another browser (Explorer, Firefox, or Chrome). Whether this fixes the problem or not, email me at ea1@Columbia.edu immediately, so that I can fix the problem promptly, and so that I can avoid that the entire class suffers from this problem.