

# Politics at Workplace: A Cause of Psychological Stress for an Employee

Dr. Tejashree Deshmukh

*(Dean-Academics, PTV's Institute of Management, Chitrakar Ketkar Marg, Vile Parle (East), Mumbai, India)*

**Abstract:** *Today stress has become an inevitable part of life for everyone. Various roles that one is expected to play at any given point and responsibilities as well as expectations associated with these roles result in tremendous stress for most of the people. Stress related to one's job or workplace is one such stressor which can play havoc in one's life. Workplace stress is not always related only to meeting the deadlines or achieving the targets. One important factor which causes a lot of stress at the workplace and is really harmful to an employee as well as the management, is the politics that people play in the organization. This paper aims to study the different kinds of political activities that take place in any organization and its impact on the employees as well as the organization as a whole.*

**Keywords:** *Politics, Workplace, Employee, Organization, Management, Stress*

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

At its basic level, stress can be defined as an individual's response to pressures arising from a situation or an event. The reasons why an individual feels stressed can vary ranging from factors like novelty to unpredictability to threat to ego to sense of control. Every individual experiences stress in the life, though the reasons and degree of stress may vary.

Stress is inevitable in one's personal life as well as professional life. Beehr and Newman (1978) defined job stress as "a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning." Various factors including high pressure situations, hindrance in accomplishing a job as well as lack of acknowledgement and recognition from the seniors, are found to be reasons for stress at workplace. Poor interpersonal relations in the organization, conflicts among employees, and a lack of social support from colleagues and superiors result in quite stressful situations at workplace (Semmer, 2006).

Though organizational politics is not the sole reason of stress at workplace, such stress can be controlled by reducing politics which is an unavoidable part of any workplace.

### **Politics at Workplace**

The most common components of organizational politics include giving more importance to achieving personal objectives than achieving organizational objectives and disregard for the protocol of the organization. Employees who indulge in political activities at workplace are found to be prioritizing self-interest over the interest of the organization.

The employees engage in political activities to realize personal agenda that varies from gaining more power, achieving personal rewards, getting promotion, or any other area of individual interest. Playing politics paves way for fulfilling such personal agenda as an employee can achieve the desired result while maintaining the status-quo of the existing organizational structure.

Politics at workplace is a very common and on-going phenomenon and despite, management's desire and actions to eliminate it, politics still prevails in every organization. An employee who does not participate in any of these activities, is at a risk of being isolated by his colleagues at the workplace and may need to compromise on his/her well-being at the office. It may also lead to an exploitation of such an employee. (Vigoda, 2000).

### **Relation between Politics at Workplace and Psychological Stress among Employees**

Not many studies were conducted regarding the possibility of organizational politics leading to psychological stress to the employees. Ferris (1996) argues that both politics as well as stress are perceptual in nature. They are not necessarily a reality, but merely an individual's perception of what they think is real. He also felt that ambiguity and uncertainty are common features of both stress and politics. Interestingly, he also noted that it is not necessarily the politics at workplace that leads to employee stress, but it can go in the reverse direction meaning that both stress can lead to political problems at workplace.

Cropanzano (1997) examined the relationship between politics at workplace and individual stressors including work stress, somatic stress and general exhaustion. He found a positive relationship between politics at workplace and the variables which are mentioned above.

Organizational politics has a potential to put employees at a risk of work related stress. Sowmya and Panchananatham (2011) found that is a strong relationship between perceived politics at workplace and

psychological distress, depression, and anxiety. Finally, Zhang and Lee (2010) were of the opinion that when perceived politics in the organization is are high, it leads to increased stress and employee turnover.

### **Why does Politics at Workplace Cause Psychological Stress for Employees?**

Organizational politics which has self-interests of the employees as its root cause, results in various negative outcomes for an organization and may even lead to the closure of the organization due to lower levels of productivity and profits (Miller, 2008) Politics at workplace results in a negative work environment. Fear and low level of confidence among employees are few of the by-products of politics at the workplace that makes achieving organizational goals difficult. (Cropanzano, 1997). Politics at the workplace adversely impact the employees as they feel that they have no control or very little control over organizational activities. It may also result in a lack of trust of those who are in power positions (Malik, 2009).

Organizational politics results in lower job satisfaction for employees. It also affects the way in which employees perceive the work environment. (Parker, 1995). Politics at workplace results into an environment where employees begin to question their values, skills, and contribution to the organization which lowers their overall confidence. Organizations which are political in nature, fail to recognize the performance of employees who contribute to the organizational goals, and unfortunately give recognition to aspects such as a group to which an employee belongs or amount of power he/she holds in the organization. This unsettles the work environment and make employees feel insecure. When employees feel that decisions are politically driven in the organization, they start getting indifferent towards formally stated missions, initiatives, and long as well as short term goals communicated to them by the organization.

HR decisions including rewards, pay raises, incentives, promotions, etc. which are political driven send a message that politicking is more important than performance. This sends a clear signal to employees that they need to channelize their energy towards such political activities than towards organizational goals. This naturally results in lower job commitment on part of these employees. The feeling of organizational citizenship diminishes with the rise in politics at workplace.

Though psychological stress to an employee at a workplace, can be caused by a variety of factors, that include handling high pressure situations, hindrance to complete a given task, as well as lack of recognition from the management, if we sit back and think about all these factors, we shall realize that the politics at workplace is at the root of all these negative things happening at the organization and so directly and indirectly leads to increased psychological stress for the employees. (Semmer, 2006).

Ensuring that political activities are not encouraged at the organization and giving clear signals to the employees about it, shall definitely help boost the productivity, morale and motivation of these employees who shall then focus on achieving the goals and objectives of the organization than either trying to achieve their own personal goals or in keeping those happy whom they fear, may harm their prospects in being and growing in the organization.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

Politics at workplace can't be completely washed out and it will always be a part of every organization. This puts a lot of psychological stress on the employees as they can't be out of it completely while being in the organization, even when they don't want to be a party to it. This stress coupled with personal agenda of those who willingly indulged in political activities at the workplace, hamper the productivity and work environment of the organization and can actually prove to be detrimental to the well-being of both, the organization and its employees.

## **III. REFERENCES**

- [1] Beehr T. and Newman J. (1978) "Job Stress, Employee Health, and Organizational Effectiveness: A Facet Analysis, Model, and Literature Review", *Personnel Psychology*
- [2] Semmer, N. (2006) "Job Stress Interventions and the Organization of Work", *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 515-527.
- [3] Vigoda, E. (2000) "Organizational Politics, Job Attitudes, and Work Outcomes: Exploration and Implications for the Public Sector", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 57(3), 326-347.
- [4] Ferris G, Frink D, Galang M, Zhou J, Kacmar K, Howard J (1996) "Perceptions of organizational politics: prediction, stress-related implications, and outcomes", *Hum Relat* 49: 233-266
- [5] Cropanzano R, Howes R, Grandey A, Toth P (1997) "The relationship of organizational politics and support to work behaviors, attitudes, and Stress", *J Organ Behav* 18: 159-180.
- [6] Sowmya K, Panchanatham N (2011) "Job burnout: An outcome of organizational politics in banking sector", *Far East Journal of Psychology and Business* 2: 49-58.
- [7] Zhang G, Lee G (2010) "The Moderation Effects of Perception of Organizational Politics on the Relationship between Work Stress and Turnover Intention: An Empirical Study about Civilian in Skeleton Government in China", *iBusiness* 2: 268-273.
- [8] Miller B., Rutherford M., & Kolodinsky R., (2008) "Perceptions of Organizational Politics: A Meta-Analysis of Outcomes", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 22(3), 209-222.
- [9] Malik M., Danish R., & Ghafoor M. (2009) "Relationship between Age, Perceptions of Organizational Politics and Job Satisfaction", *Journal of Behavioural Sciences* Vol, 19(1-2).
- [10] Parker C., Dipboye R., & Jackson S. (1995) "Perceptions of Organizational Politics: An Investigation of Antecedents and Consequences", *Journal of Management*, 21(5), 891-912.