

Managing with Power: Power and Influence in Organizations

General Course Information:

MGMT 7714-001-20022.MGMT POWER & INFLUENCE IN ORGA
8:30am 4:30pm
BTBA room RTBA

Instructor Information:

Eric Abrahamson
E-mail: ea1@columbia.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

Instructor Information:



[Eric Abrahamson](#)

Professor
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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

Power and influence are present in all organizations to some extent, and in many to a great extent. For those considering careers in management or who will work in an organization, it is important to be able to understand and diagnose organizational political systems, and to understand and be able to implement strategies to get things decided and accomplished. Management and leadership invariably involve the acquisition and exercise of power. Although it may be called something less sensitive, like supervision, administration, or leadership, the fundamental task of the manager is to develop and use power and influence to accomplish things.

Course Objectives

This course has its primary objective making power and influence processes conscious and analyzing them in detail. The other major objectives of the course are:

1. Developing conceptual understanding of power; you should be able to define power, understand the conditions under which it is used, know how to predict people's point of view on decisions, be able to forecast likely alliances, understand why some have more power than others, and understand the strategies and tactics by which power gets employed;
2. Developing your clinical or observational skills; you should be able to more accurately watch power and influence processes as they unfold, and predict the choice that will be made in decision situations as well as the behavior of others interacting in that situation;

3. Giving you an opportunity to determine your own comfort level with various power strategies and tactics as well as confronting the question of how much power and influence you really want to exercise, and consequently, what types of situations and organizations you are most likely to be comfortable and successful in.

Method of Instruction

The course is divided into three sections. The first section is an introduction to the concepts of power and interdependence. Here we explore the circumstances under which power and influence will be more prominent as features of organizational life, as well as learning how to figure out the relevant political subdivisions in an organization and how to diagnose points of view on issues. The second section focuses on sources of power and why some have more power than others. We will consider both personal attributes and structural position as sources of power. The third section treats the strategies or, to use a less grand term, the tactics by which power and influence get exercised in organizations. Issues of timing, the use of information and analysis, language, and the social psychology of interpersonal influence are considered.

Method of Evaluation

Course Requirements:

You will be evaluated on three types of work: 1) your performance on a final paper or examination (60% of the course grade); 2) the quality of your contributions to class discussion of the course material (20% of the grade); and on 3) self-reflective short papers (20% of the grade).

Final examination or paper

You can pick to take a final exam or to write a final paper. You can write the type of final paper you want, as long as we discuss it before hand. My experience has been that two types of papers are very enriching for people taking this class: 1) An in depth analysis of power and politics bearing on a particular topic that interests you, and 2) a paper designed to help you analyze your current position or articulate and plan your transition to your next position. This second type of paper will give you the opportunity to apply concepts and lessons of the course to your current or new position. You might want to address the four broad questions below, for instance:

1. What is your assessment of the power dynamics of your position, the position you will be taking, or the type of position that you would like to land?
2. What are the sources of power and influence skills necessary for you to be effective and ethical in this position?
3. Do your current sources of power and your influence skills fit the requirement of the position?
4. What is your plan for developing the sources of power, influence skills, and partnerships necessary to be effective. If you are considering a new position you might want to plan what you would do (1) before actually taking your position, (2) your first month in the position, and (3) by then end of your first year?

If you don't want to write a paper, you must tell me so by class 5. The final examination will consist of a case, similar to the ones we will be discussing in class. I will expect you to use your knowledge and insights gained from the class to analyze and diagnose the situation and come up with some specific recommendations concerning what to do. There is no reward for memorizing names, definitions, and constructs per se; there is great reward for mastering the material so you are able to use it to cope with a real situation. The final examination and preparing for it will give

you the opportunity to review and consolidate your learning.

Class participation.

Class participation is also a very important part of the learning process in this course. You will be evaluated on your contributions to that participation. It is obviously difficult to contribute to the class if you are absent. I do not have a rule as to how many classes you are permitted to miss. However, class participation is important. A contribution to class discussion is a comment which possesses one or more of the following properties; 1) offers a different and unique, but relevant insight to the issue; 2) moves the discussion and analysis forward to generate new insights; 3) builds on the preceding discussion; 4) relates to personal anecdote or experience in a way that helps to illuminate the ideas being discussed; and 5) uses logic, evidence, and creative thinking, and is more than merely an expression of an opinion or feeling.

Reflective writing Assignments

These three reflective writing assignments are entirely for your own benefit. They are short written assignments intended to help you reflect and learn from your past work experience. They have proved to be a useful background preparation for writing the second type of final paper.

1. Memo A: How can you go about assessing the power dynamics of your position?
2. Memo B. What are your goals, with respect to Power and Politics, over the next five years of your career? For the following five years? What position(s) would you like to attain? What values would you like to adhere to in attaining this (these) position(s) (e.g., work-life balance, ethics, etc...?)
3. Memo C. Think about your position. How effective have you been politically? Be specific about your strengths and areas in which you need further development to function in this position and to reach the objectives you laid out in Memo B.

These memos are to be no more than two pages long and are graded pass/fail.

Required Materials

Syllabus

Case pack

Jeffrey Pfeffer's, *Managing With Power: Shaping Political Dynamics at Work*. Harvard Business School Press.

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