

6.3.7: Summary of Learning Outcomes

13.1 Power in Interpersonal Relations

1. How do power bases work in organizational life?

We might think of power like a car battery and influence as the current that actually gets the starter motor to turn over. There are many potential sources of power such as knowledge, information, and money. But just as the car battery unconnected cannot start an engine, these sources of power do not by themselves cause others to do anything. Actually, influencing others is achieved by possessing, or having others believe you possess, resources that they desire and depend upon and for which substitutes are not easily obtained and then establishing behavioral contingencies in the direction of the behaviors you desire to evoke.

Power is an interpersonal relationship in which one person or group has the ability to cause another person or group to take an action that it would not have taken otherwise.

There are five basic kinds of power: (1) referent, (2) expert, (3) legitimate, (4) reward, and (5) coercive.

Depending upon which kind of power is employed, the recipient of a power effort can respond with commitment, compliance, or resistance.

13.2 Uses of Power

2. How do you recognize and account for the exercise of counterpower and make appropriate use of strategic contingencies in interunit or interorganizational relations?

Power dependency is the extent to which a person or group is susceptible to an influence attempt. Included here is the notion of counterpower, or the ability of the subordinate to exercise some power and buffer the influence attempt of another.

Common power tactics include controlling access to information, controlling access to persons, the selective use of objective criteria, controlling the agenda, using outside experts, bureaucratic gamesmanship, and forming coalitions and alliances.

The resource dependence model suggests that one unit within an organization has power over another unit when the first unit controls scarce and valued resources needed by the second unit.

The strategic contingencies model asserts that one unit has power over another when the first group has the ability to block the second group's goal attainment—that is, when it controls some strategic contingency needed by the second group to complete its task.

13.3 Political Behavior in Organizations

3. How do managers cope effectively with organizational politics?

Politics involves those activities taken within an organization to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to attain preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty and disagreement over choices.

Political behavior is more likely to occur when (1) there are ambiguous goals, (2) there is a scarcity of resources, (3) nonroutine technology and a complex external environment are involved, (4) nonprogrammed decisions are being considered, and (5) organizational change is occurring.

13.4 Limiting the Influence of Political Behavior

4. How do you recognize and limit inappropriate or unethical political behavior where it occurs? Political behavior can be reduced or minimized in organizations through four techniques: (1) reducing organization uncertainty, (2) reducing interunit competition, (3) breaking up political fiefdoms, and (4) preventing the development of future fiefdoms.

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