

13.5: Limiting the Influence of Political Behavior

4. How do you recognize and limit inappropriate or unethical political behavior where it occurs?

The final topic we will examine concerns ways in which people and groups can attempt to lessen the impact of political behavior. Clearly, politics in organizations cannot be eliminated. Yet to some extent, the negative aspects of it can be neutralized if managers carefully monitor the work environment and take remedial action where necessary. Part of this issue was discussed above, in the section on counterpower. Beyond this, however, several strategies can be identified that can help manage organizational politics. As shown in **Table 13.3**, four basic strategies can be used.²⁸

First, efforts can be made to reduce the uncertainty in the organization through clarifying job responsibilities, bases for evaluations and rewards, and so forth. The less ambiguity in the system, the less room there is for dysfunctional political behavior. Second, managers can try to reduce interpersonal or intergroup competition by using impartial standards for resource allocation and by emphasizing the superordinate goals of the entire organization—toward which all members of the organization should be working. Third, managers can attempt to break up existing political fiefdoms through personnel reassignment or transfer or by changing the reward system to encourage interunit cooperation. Finally, managers can work to prevent the development of future fiefdoms through training programs, selection and promotion, and reward distribution.

To the extent that employees see the organization as a fair place to work and to the extent that clear goals and resource allocation procedures are present, office politics should subside, though not disappear. In organizations where politics prosper, in fact, you are likely to find a reward system that encourages and promotes such behavior. The choice is up to the organization.

Limiting the Effects of Political Behavior
To Reduce System Uncertainty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make clear what are the bases and processes for evaluation. • Differentiate rewards among high and low performers. • Make sure the rewards are as immediately and directly related to performance as possible.
To Reduce Competition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to minimize resource competition among managers. • Replace resource competition with externally oriented goals and objectives.
To Break Existing Political Fiefdoms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where highly cohesive political empires exist, break them apart by removing or splitting the most dysfunctional subgroups. • If you are an executive, be keenly sensitive to managers whose mode of operation is the personalization of political patronage. First, approach these persons with a directive to “stop the political maneuvering.” If it continues, remove them from the positions and preferably from the company.
To Prevent Future Fiefdoms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make one of the most important criteria for promotion an apolitical attitude that puts organizational ends ahead of personal power ends.
<p><i>Source:</i> Adapted from “The Use and Abuse of Corporate Politics,” by Don R. Beeman and Thomas W. Sharkey. Reprinted from <i>Business Horizons</i>, March–April 1987 by the Foundation for the School of Business at Indiana University.</p>

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concept check

- How can managers limit inappropriate and unethical behavior in the organization?

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