

Workplace Politics: Everything You Need to Know

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Introduction

When you think politics, the usual rhetoric comes to mind: how the country is run. Politics in general looks at the power differences in any environment, whether it be in a household, in the office or when running the affairs of a country. Although we may want to prevent it, all workplaces are political to some extent, simply because people bring their personal emotions, needs, ambitions, and insecurities into their professional lives. This article will explore what *office politics* are and what happens when this is present in an organisation.

Examples of *Office Politics*

Office politics comes in various forms and shapes, some in ways we would have never guessed them to be. Satore (2013), offer some examples of different ways that can be regarded as being part of *office politics*.

Sucking up	Giving someone a piece of your mind
Being the 'yes' person	Favouritism
Abusive managers	Nepotism
Gossiping co-workers	Betrayal
An e-mail war	False rumours

The Negative Consequences of *Office Politics*

Politics are not a small issue to arise in an organisation and can cause many issues among people and peers. Have you ever found yourself on either side of politics in any setting? Most of us have, even when we do not want to. To be on the safe side, find ways in which you can go around the *office politics* at work. Chron (2019), provides possible problems that could arise when *office politics* are at large in the organisation.

- **Divisiveness:** Whether the politics originate in the public sphere or between individuals within the office, they can result in a lack of harmony and cooperation in the workplace. Ideally, individuals can separate their political opinions from their work lives, but in the real world some people are unable to do this and they let differing opinions get in the way of effective workplace behaviour. The result can be employees who don't work well together simply because they hold incompatible political viewpoints.
- **Distraction:** Passionate discussion of political issues has its place but can distract workers from the tasks that they should be focusing on. Whether people are agreeing or disagreeing about politics, they aren't likely to be doing their work when they are discussing politics. *Office politics*

are as distracting as public politics, as employees spend time discussing who is dating whom and why this bothers someone else or which employee is disliked by which manager and what he's going to do about it. Avoiding any of these discussions while at work is the easiest way to remain focused on the job at hand.

- **Feuds:** In a worst-case scenario, political discussions grow into ongoing differences of opinion between two groups, something that can result in disruptive feuds that split a workplace into opposing camps. Good managers see this sort of thing developing and stop it before it gets out of hand. If ongoing feuds are allowed to develop over a long time, the result can be compromised productivity in the workplace, hurting everyone equally, no matter what their political positions.
- **Disciplinary Action:** Negative effects for someone who disruptively discusses politics at work can include rebukes by management and, in extreme cases, termination. Political issues can grow into a complex series of accusations and counter-accusations as employees make claims of free speech and managers respond with charges of poor performance and lack of conscientious work. It may appear that a worker is being persecuted for his political opinions, when in fact the discipline is because he was simply not doing his job. The easiest way to avoid these complex troubles is to save political discussions for evenings and weekends.

How to Survive Office Politics

What if there is a way around office politics? According to MindTools (2020), there are some ways in which office politics can be used for the better. These are outlined below:

- **Build Connections** - Now that you know how existing relationships work, you can start to build your own social network. Look beyond your immediate team, and cross the formal hierarchy in all directions – co-workers, managers and executives. Don't be afraid of politically powerful people. Instead, get to know them, and build [high-quality connections](#) that avoid empty flattery. Be friendly with everyone, but avoid aligning yourself too closely with one group or another. If you are considering a [personal relationship at work](#), be certain to base it on consent, to avoid any suggestion of illegal or inappropriate influence, and to never break confidentiality.
- **Develop Your People Skills** - As we have seen, politics are all about people, so strong [interpersonal skills](#) will stand you in good stead when it comes to building and maintaining your network. Reflect on your emotions, what prompts them, and how you handle them. If you can learn to self-regulate, you'll be able to think before you act. This kind of emotional intelligence helps you to pick up on other people's emotions, too, and to understand what kind of approach they like or dislike. Learn to [listen carefully](#), too. When you invest time in listening, you'll slow down, focus, and learn.
- **Make the Most of Your Network** - Through your relationships, you can build [your personal brand](#) and [raise your team's profile](#). When you communicate your achievements to your connections, they might open up opportunities to "shine" for you, your team, and your boss. They can also act as a "bridge" between you and other colleagues.
- **Be Brave but Not Naïve** - Your first instinct may be to keep your distance from people who practice "bad" politics. The opposite can be more effective. The expression, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer," often applies to office politics. So, get to know the gossips and

manipulators better. Be courteous but guarded, as they may repeat what you say with a negative "spin." Try to understand their goals, so that you can avoid or counter the impact of their negative politicking. And be aware that some people behave badly because they feel insecure – this is a form of [self-sabotage](#).

- Neutralise Negative Politics - You can help to make a workplace become more positive by not "fuelling the fire" and joining in negative politics. For example, avoid passing on [rumours](#) without taking time to carefully consider their source, credibility and impact. And don't rely on confidentiality. It's safer to assume that whatever you say will be repeated, so choose carefully what "secrets" you reveal. Remain [professional](#) at all times, and don't take sides, or get sucked into arguments or recriminations. When a conflict arises, remember that there doesn't have to be a winner and a loser. It's often possible to find a solution that satisfies everyone. If you're [voicing concerns or criticism](#) of your own, be confident and assertive but not aggressive. And make sure that you take an organisational perspective and not simply a selfish one.

Conclusion

Office politics will always be there and it does raise many concerns. The best to combat this negative phenomenon is to make sure that **you** are on the right side of the issue. If everyone ensures that they are doing the correct thing, the occurrence is bound to decrease.

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