

# ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

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Politics at Work

Robert Lee and Peter Lawrence

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ROBERT LEE AND PETER LAWRENCE

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# ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR: Politics at Work

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Robert Lee and Peter Lawrence

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*To Maggie  
and  
To Pat*



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# PREFACE

‘Organizational Behaviour’ or ‘OB’ is not yet a neatly defined academic discipline. In the current literature it has a wide range of definitions and there is a confusing array of related subjects and alternative or overlapping names, including human resource management, organization theory, industrial psychology, industrial sociology, personnel management and human relations.

In its broadest sense OB is the study of people in organizations. We do not propose to describe all the different emphases which the inquisitive student will find. It is easier if we just say what we propose to do.

It will soon become clear to the reader that our treatment is not entirely the conventional textbook restatement, albeit in simplified form, of available material from specialist writers. We *will* be describing much fundamental OB theory, however, and will assume no prior knowledge. Where this book differs from many others is in the underlying framework used to analyse and build on OB concepts. By making assumptions about people and organizations which are different from those usually made we mean to throw new light on old topics, bringing them much closer to the fascinating reality of modern organizations. We believe the new approach to OB which is beginning to emerge in the literature, and which forms the basis of this book, will equip the future manager much better for the trials which lie ahead than the simplistic approach of most existing texts.

So what is new about this book on OB? The newness stems from two things. First, the general perspective which we adopt has not been used before to develop a comprehensive textbook. This perspective is known as the political approach; it will be introduced in Chapter 2. Broadly, the organization is conceived of as a coalition of different interest groups which are competing and co-operating as they pursue a variety of ends. No prior right is given to any of the parties involved in the organization to have their own way. As Chapter 1 will show, previous perspectives have tended to be ‘managerialist’, concerned with some, often unspecified, measures of ‘effectiveness’ and ‘efficiency’ towards which the manager *should* be working for the good of the organization. We are concerned with what happens in practice.

The second aspect of newness concerns the ideas about people which are built

into our approach. People are characterized primarily as active and goal-seeking, rather than passive and need-orientated. It is one of our hopes for this book that the reader, having emerged at the other end, will never again be a passive pawn to be manoeuvred unknowingly in the organizational political milieu.

*Robert Lee*  
*Peter Lawrence*

# STRUCTURE

The first part of *Organizational Behaviour: Politics at Work* reviews the development of ideas about organizations. The classical writings of Fayol and Taylor provide the foundations for understanding many management concepts, and the human relations perspective of Mayo pushes people into the foreground where they belong. By considering organizations as systems, a new set of variables and relationships can be explored, adding to the picture and developing deeper insights. Contingency theorists have picked out some of these variables, including structure, environment and technology, and shown how their study can further improve our ability to understand and manage. Finally, in Part One, the political approach is presented as the next logical development in organization theory, the next step on the road to reality.

In Part Two we will take three chapters to discuss some of the major aspects of modern OB – motivation, group dynamics and organization structures, cultures and climates. The reader will find a broad overview of these subjects in terms of conventional theories and concepts, yet this will be developed using the political approach to create new interpretations and insights. Each of these chapters finishes with a discussion of its implications for the practising manager.

Part Three is about influencing behaviour, and it is at this point that the political approach is expanded and developed. The four chapters in this section will discuss the different bases of power and how they operate, the context of the political process and its different facets, political strategy formulation, and how to understand and develop strategy in specific political situations. We hope that by the end of his journey the reader will be well equipped to contemplate his place in any political milieu and have a chance to actively influence the behaviour of others.

The book closes with a short Epilogue. Having set aside the subject of ethics in order to develop, without inhibition, the valuable insights which may be gained from the political model, a major point is made – theories can be amoral but managers cannot.

# 'BOXES'

The political perspective is introduced for the first time in the last part of Chapter 2. During the next three chapters it underlies much of the commentary and critique of contemporary OB. Also, specific aspects of the approach are gradually developed where they build on, or relate to, conventional ideas. The core of the perspective, however, is not given full treatment until Part Three.

To stimulate the reader's interest in what is to come, 'boxes' have been inserted at strategic points in the text during Parts One and Two. These are all headed 'A Rethink . . .' and deal with some issue related to OB. They serve three additional functions: to emphasize points being made in the text, to introduce ideas which will be dealt with in more detail later and to make points which are relevant but not made elsewhere.

The reader is invited to browse through the boxes before starting to tackle the text. He or she will get the flavour of what lies within.

# \*POLITICAL MAN

- Political man knows what he wants. He knows his own strengths and limitations; he decides on his goals.
- Political man understands the environment in which he finds himself. In fact he chooses his situation for the benefits it provides. He knows the systems, the rules, the pressures, the opportunities and the threats. He is fully conversant with all the circumstances.
- Political man studies his rivals; he can see the situation from their point of view. He identifies their goals and the strategies they may pursue.
- Political man has contacts. He has friends and allies with whom he co-operates for mutual benefit.
- Political man thinks through his strategies, he assesses a range of options in terms of costs, risks and outcomes. He considers any undesirable side-effects or aftermath.
- Political man takes action.
- Political man gets his way – more often than most.

\* No sexism intended. The masculine form is used purely in line with publishing convention.



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# PART ONE

# UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONS:

- 1 Classical, human relations and systems approaches
- 2 Contingency theory and politics

In this first part of *Organizational Behaviour: Politics at Work* we will take two chapters to review the development of ideas about organizations. This is a necessary stepping stone on the way to understanding people in organizations. We will see that there are several different 'organization theories' which provide a range of different frameworks for thinking, and help us to identify some of the key concepts to be given more detailed treatment later. We will see how organization structure, individual motivation, group behaviour, interpersonal influence, and other important facets of organization life have formed parts of the major theories of other writers, and we will discuss the strengths and limitations of each perspective.

In the latter part of Chapter 2 the reader is introduced to the political perspective which underlies the body of the book. By then he will have learned about earlier perspectives and will be able to fully appreciate how the new approach differs.

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# CLASSICAL, HUMAN RELATIONS AND SYSTEMS APPROACHES

In this chapter we briefly describe the development of organization theory. The 'Classical' ideas of early management writers are discussed and the 'Human Relations' approach is introduced as the foundation for modern OB. The widely used 'Systems' theme is explored and presented as underpinning the conventional wisdom about organizations. The term 'managerialism' is explained and its consequences examined.

## Organization theory

Organization theory is the study of ways of thinking about organizations. Within this subject area there are many different schools of thought, with a range of contrasting and conflicting ideas, and we shall be examining three of the major ones in this chapter.

Some of the important questions which any theory of organizations must tackle are:

- What are the key variables which determine what happens in organizations?
- What goals does, or should, an organization pursue?
- How is the organization co-ordinated or bound together?
- What assumptions can we make about the motivation and behaviour of the people in the organization?

Everyone who has experience of formal organizations has some kind of organization theory. It may be implicit, only part formed, inconsistent, but it is none the less there, influencing the individual's perception of what goes on around him and his behaviour. When the individual is a manager it is important for him to be aware of his personal theory in order that he can act reasonably in a range of situations, and also develop his ideas as new experiences provide feedback on how useful his view of the organizational world is. Without this kind of personal organization theory the manager would just respond unpredictably to new circumstances and would be unable to make sense of the complex environment in which he works.