

ONLINE COUNTERPOINT 13.9

How is this understanding reconciled with the frequently expressed idea that organizations have common `needs' and `goals'? If there are indeed `different interests and goals' amongst organization members, does it make any sense to say that organizations have (shared) goals? Often the goals attributed to the organization are those dictated by the most vocal and influential group – the senior executives.

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Conflict extends to radical disagreements about the goals to be attained, and is not restricted to interference.

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Perhaps the most pervasive and potent form of power is the kind that becomes so institutionalized that it is taken for granted and accepted. There is then no need for `person or department in an organization to influence other people to bring about desired outcomes' because it would not occur to anyone to do otherwise.

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Authority can be regarded as institutionalized power in which the command or request of those occupying positions of authority is followed without a flicker of doubt about its justification or legitimacy.

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This is a good illustration of how power can be exercised to shape or `rig' the rules of the game. The appointment of the new vice-president was strongly influenced, but behind the scenes, by the CEO.

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With increased outsourcing of IT, it is likely that of those that remain, their power will be considerable precisely because they have been assessed as being too important or `core' to outsource.

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A shortcoming of this understanding of power is that it assumes a `rational' basis for the relative power of departments – that is, their centrality for attaining organizational goals. This takes no account of internal `politicking', including the capacity of different departments to define and pursue goals that they calculate to be congruent with their own expansion.

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These examples each illustrate the role of internal politicking noted in the previous Counterpoint. Of course, part of this politicking involves making 'rational' cases for additional resources to be allocated to particular departments on the basis of their vaunted strategic importance.

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It may partially account for this. Such a view of politics also suggests that it is a marginal or exceptional activity, and not something that is endemic to organizing or managing.

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Politics may not resolve differences or build coalitions. Instead, it may contain differences and institutionalize conflicts – for example, by introducing procedures for addressing them.

ONLINE COUNTERPOINT 13.19

As noted in an earlier Counterpoint, the most effective form of organizational politics is the kind that inhibits disagreements or grievances from emerging or effectively suppresses their expression – for example, by managing expectations.