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Personnel/Human Resources Management: A Political Influence Perspective

Gerald R. Ferris
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Timothy A. Judge
Cornell University

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Keywords

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**Personnel/Human Resources Management:
A Political Influence Perspective**

Gerald R. Ferris
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Timothy A. Judge
Cornell University

Working Paper # 90-21

Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies
New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations
Cornell University
388 Ives Hall
Ithaca, New York 14851-0952
(607) 255-2740

This paper has not undergone formal review or approval of the faculty of the ILR School. It is intended to make results of Center research, conferences, and projects available to others interested in human resource management in preliminary form to encourage discussion and suggestions.

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Abstract

It was suggested over ten years ago that new and different perspectives needed to be applied to the Personnel/Human Resources Management (P/HRM) field in an effort to promote theory and research and expand our understanding of the dynamics underlying P/HRM processes. Both theory and research are emerging which characterize important P/HRM decisions and activities as substantially influenced by opportunistic behavior of both subordinates and supervisors. The purpose of the present review is to systematically examine the P/HRM field from a political influence perspective, reviewing existing theory and research and discussing future directions.

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Personnel/Human Resources Management:

A Political Influence Perspective

The field of Personnel/Human Resources Management (P/HRM) has evolved, over the years, from a largely record-keeping, maintenance function to one of generally acknowledged strategic importance to the organization (e.g., Butler, Ferris, & Napier, 1991; Rowland & Ferris, 1982). Furthermore, from a research standpoint, P/HRM has advanced from a primarily atheoretical, "problem-driven" discipline (i.e., research generated by the need to solve real-world problems or address issues of major importance to the practice of P/HRM), to one actively concerned with both theoretical and methodological development. Over ten years ago, Ferris (1980) called for alternative theoretical and methodological perspectives on P/HRM efforts to advance our understanding and promote theory and research. In recent years, a number of different perspectives have been taken in the P/HRM field, including economic/utility and international, as well as the more macro-level organization theory and strategy perspectives. Some of these perspectives have been examined and reflected in previous Yearly Review articles (Fisher, 1989; Mahoney & Deckop, 1986).

The purpose of this Yearly Review article is to examine the P/HRM field from a political influence perspective; a perspective that has been actively pursued in other fields, but has only recently been suggested as a way of viewing the P/HRM field (Ferris & King, 1990; Frost, 1989). A reasonably comprehensive

review is reported on theory and research concerning political influence processes and how they emerge to affect key P/HRM decisions and activities.

The Political Influence Perspective

Organizational scientists have developed different notions of what constitutes political behavior, and these notions have come from a number of different disciplines. Some have defined politics in terms of the behavior of the interest groups to use power to influence decision making (Pettigrew, 1973; Tushman, 1977), or through coalition-building and bargaining (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980). Others have focused on the self-serving and organizationally nonsanctioned nature of individual behavior in organizations (e.g., Burns, 1961; Porter, 1976; Farrell & Peterson, 1982; Mayes & Allen, 1977; Schein, 1977; Gandz & Murray, 1980). Still others have characterized organizational politics as a social influence process with potentially functional or dysfunctional organizational consequences (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1979; Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989b; Porter, Allen, & Angle, 1981), or simply the management of influence (Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1980). While subscribing to aspects of several of these definitions, Pfeffer (1981b) more directly established the linkage between politics and power, and conceived of organizational politics as "the study of power in action" (p. 7). Mintzberg (1983) referred to politics as "individual or group behavior that is informal, ostensibly parochial, typically divisive, and above all, in the

technical sense, illegitimate -- sanctioned neither by formal authority, accepted ideology, nor certified expertise (though it may exploit any one of these)" (p. 172).

Yet other views of political influence have adopted a decidedly more social psychological perspective, and have conceptualized such influence as impression management, often isolating on the particular tactic of ingratiation (e.g., Gardner & Martinko, 1988; Liden & Mitchell, 1988; Ralston, 1985; Wortman & Linsenmeier, 1977). Schlenker (1980), a leading impression management theorist, has defined impression management as "the conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions" (p. 6). Whereas the foregoing do not exhaust all possible definitions of political influence, they provide a representative sample.

It appears to be of much less use, for purposes of this article, to offer yet another definition of the politics construct, than it is to capture the essence of and develop a working notion of political influence that makes sense for our examination of P/HRM decisions and activities. Consistent with this objective, the notion of political influence as the management of shared meaning adopted by Ferris, King, Judge, and Kacmar (in press) is used in this article. This notion is derived from Sederberg (1984), who believed politics consists of any deliberate attempt to "create, maintain, modify, or abandon shared meanings" (p. 7) among participants in social settings. Rather than inherent properties of situations, meanings are the

result of our responses to those situations and our subsequent interpretations. Whether more or less, we all have a say in the interpretations of those events and some consensus forms, usually legitimized by organizational symbols and myths. These "shared meanings" then provide guidelines for future interpretations and organizational behavior. The idea is to manage the meaning of the situation to produce the outcomes desired.

According to Sederberg (1984), all behavior is not political since the emphasis is on deliberate attempts to control the meanings shared by all. This omits non-deliberate behavior such as routine or mindless activity and types of deliberate behavior that are not specifically geared toward creating, maintaining, or altering shared meanings. Characterizing political influence as deliberate attempts to manage or control the meanings shared by others provides an interesting opportunity to examine how employees in organizations, as well as job applicants, use this process to influence key human resource decisions. This characterization is similar to the "managed thought" notion proposed by Chatman, Bell, and Staw (1986) in their discussion of the role of impression management in organizations.

Political Influence Tactics

A number and variety of different political influence tactics have been identified and examined in organizational research (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Porter et al., 1981; Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984; Yukl & Falbe, 1990). However, it is probably most convenient, for the

present purposes, to think of influence tactics as falling into two categories: assertive tactics and defensive tactics.

Perhaps the best known assertive tactic is ingratiation.

Ingratiation can take a number of forms such as favor doing, other enhancement (e.g., flattery), opinion conformity (i.e., expressing opinions similar to a focal other), or subservient behavior (the "utility or humility"). Other types of assertive tactics involve self-promotion, or the act of bringing to light one's personal accomplishments, characteristics, or qualities in order to present oneself in the most favorable manner. Self promotion can take at least two different forms, materializing as entitlements or enhancements. Entitlements involve verbal claims of responsibility for positive events or outcomes that have occurred, even when one cannot actually be rightfully credited with such outcomes. Enhancements refer to attempts to exaggerate or make more of one's accomplishments than is justified. Thus, the category of assertive influence tactics involves proactive efforts to manipulate or manage images conveyed to important others, and consequently to manage shared meanings. Most of our research has focused on employee assertive tactics because this category is more typical of the ways the dark side of politics is played out in human resource systems, as we will see in the following sections of the paper.

The other category of influence behaviors is defensive tactics, and refers to more reactive attempts to circumvent negative outcomes. For example, in situations of poor

performance, employees may utilize tactics such as apologies, excuses, justifications, or disclaimers in order to prevent negative consequences (e.g., Wood & Mitchell, 1981). Taken together, these two categories of influence tactics provide some indication of the nature of political influence tactics in organizations, and the diversified portfolio of techniques that are brought to bear upon human resource systems and decisions. Furthermore, not all influence behaviors are similarly perceived or equally effective, as will be seen in the subsequent review of empirical research.

The P/HRM Context: Antecedents of Political Behavior

Political behavior, like any other behavior in organizations, does not operate in a vacuum. The use of influence tactics is undoubtedly enhanced by some aspects of the environment and suppressed by others. Past theoretical efforts and empirical findings have suggested the existence of several environmental antecedents to political influence behavior.

Ambiguity and Formalization

Ferris et al. (1989b) have suggested that influence behavior is more apt to occur in ambiguous environments. One way to define ambiguity is the absence of information. When ambiguity is high, the individual may have few clues in which to direct their behavior. Absent clear behavioral cues, Ferris et al. argued the greater the probability of furthering one's self-interest by engaging in influence behavior. As Ferris et al. have suggested, when the situation is ambiguous -- meaning

that clear evaluation criteria do not exist -- reliance is often placed on subjective criteria for personnel decisions. Given Mintzberg's (1983) reference to the informal nature of political behavior, ambiguous environments with reliance on the subjective is an environment in which the use of influence tactics is likely to flourish. For example, Gilmore and Ferris (1989a, 1989b), discussing ambiguity in the context of the employment interview, offered the interesting proposition that inexperienced interviewers with little information about the job provide a receptive forum for applicant influence behaviors.

The importance of ambiguity on the use of influence tactics has been reinforced by the findings from several studies. Fandt and Ferris (1990) found that ambiguity coupled with accountability led to greater management of information by individuals. Closely related to ambiguity is the degree of formalization in organizations. Formalized procedures in organizations serve to reduce ambiguity in order to place closer controls on behavior. Thus, in highly formalized organizations individuals would be expected to be less likely to perceive that their influence tactics would be effective. Mintzberg's (1983) research demonstrated that political behavior was weakest in formalized organizations. However, Ferris, Judge, and Rowland (1990) found no significant relationship between perceived formalization and the use of influence tactics.

Spatial Distance

Ferris et al. (1990) argued that one of the more important situational determinants of influence behaviors may be spatial distance, or the proximity in which subordinates work with their supervisors. Ferris et al. hypothesized that the effect of spatial distance is likely to depend on the type of influence tactic employed. For tactics oriented toward the job (e.g., covering up a negative event), distance between the supervisor and subordinate was thought to allow greater opportunity to enact job-focused tactics beyond the watchful eye of the supervisor. However, tactics oriented toward the supervisor (e.g., volunteering to help the supervisor with his or her tasks) obviously require the supervisor's presence! Therefore, decreased spatial distance was thought to promote the use of supervisor-focused influence tactics. Ferris et al. found that spatial distance did result in significantly greater use of supervisor-focused tactics, but no significant decrease in the use of job-focused tactics.

Accountability

Caldwell and O' Reilly (1982) found that those having the most responsibility were more likely to manage impressions. In a sense, these individuals have the most to lose in terms of their position power by not managing impressions. Further, Pfeffer (1981a) argued that one way for high position holders to add to their power base and perceived image is to present favorable impressions. Fandt and Ferris (1990) found that accountability

interacted with ambiguity in the management of impressions. Those in conditions of high accountability and low ambiguity manipulated information more.

Instrumentality

Ferris et al. (1989b) hypothesized that instrumentality was an important determinant of influence behavior. Those individuals perceiving an environment rewarding the use of influence tactics are more likely to be inclined to use such tactics. Conversely, those seeing little or even negative reinforcements for influence behavior may understandably be reluctant to use them. Janson and Von Glinow (1985) corroborated this when they argued that political behavior is most likely to occur when rewarded by the organization.

The nature of the environment in reinforcing political behavior, in addition to shaping the use of influence tactics, may also affect the way individuals perceive their environment. Those who perceive the organization environment as hostile to the use of influence behavior may see use of influence tactics as threats to their careers. On the other hand, individuals perceiving influence behavior as a means to enhance their career are more likely to see influence as an opportunity. Ferris et al. (1989b) argued that these politics perceptions, in turn, are likely to affect the individual's behavior (e.g., withdrawal) in the organization.

As suggested by Ferris et al. (1989b), the perceptions of the instrumentality of influence behavior, or whether political

influence is likely to be seen as an opportunity or threat, probably is molded by how one's supervisor's influence behavior is reinforced. Research by Weiss (1977, 1978) suggests that employees often model the work values and management styles of their supervisors. Given this, it stands to reason that when the supervisors' behavior is instrumental in achieving valued outcomes, such behavior is more likely to occur.

The Role of Individual Differences

Just as the characteristics of the environment are likely to explain variance in influence tactics, differences between individuals also likely affect influence behavior. In fact, past work in the impression management area has identified several individual characteristics thought to affect influence behavior.

Self-Monitoring

Those who possess the desire to manage impressions will undoubtedly require the ability to control their own behavior to be successful. Self-monitoring is a personality construct that concerns exactly this -- the ability of individuals to monitor and control their behavior (Snyder, 1987). The individual high on self-monitoring is one who can carefully scan the environment for social cues, and modify their behavior accordingly. This is obviously an important skill to the implementation of influence tactics.

Self-monitoring has received some empirical attention. Caldwell and O' Reilly (1982), investigating situations in which decision-makers were faced with failure, found that

self-monitoring significantly predicted the extent to which they engaged in opportunistic behaviors. Von Baeyer, Shirk, and Zanna (1981) found that self-monitoring predicted impression management tactics by applicants in the context of the interview. On the other hand, Ferris et al. (1990) found that self-monitoring showed some relationship with job-focused influence tactics, but no relationship with supervisor-focused tactics. Finally, Fandt and Ferris' (1990) results indicated that self-monitoring significantly predicted the use of information manipulation, particularly when accountability was high.

Self-Attention

Self-attention refers to the extent to which individuals direct attention toward, rather than away from, themselves (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Those that direct attention away from themselves can be expected to focus attention on others. Those concerned with other's thoughts, in turn, might be more motivated by this concern for others' impressions to manage these impressions (Fenigstein, 1979). Unfortunately, no empirical data is available on the role of self-attention in influence behavior. Thus, it remains an important area for future research.

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety, as its name implies, represents the degree to which individuals experience anxiety when in the presence of others (Watson & Friend, 1969). A significant manifestation of this anxiety is the fear of negative evaluations from others (Leary, 1983). It is reasonable to expect that those fearing

negative evaluations from others will tend to be more motivated to manage these evaluations. Arkin, Appelman, and Burger (1980), in a series of studies, demonstrated that individuals high in social anxiety were more likely to attempt to present a favorable image of themselves. Thus, it appears that individuals afraid of negative evaluations by supervisors or co-workers may be more likely to avoid negative impressions by managing them.

Machiavellianism

Machiavellians (Machs), after their namesake, are individuals who will do most anything to enhance their self-interests, including manipulation, lying, and exploiting the misfortunes of others (Christie & Geis, 1970). These behaviors obviously represent the dark side of influence behavior. Research supports that high Machs are more likely to manage impressions of others (Kauffmann & Steiner, 1968; Pandey, 1981; Pandey & Rastogi, 1979). Touhey (1973) has argued that Machiavellianism allows goal attainment only to those skillful enough to conceal their underlying motives. Perhaps supporting this hypothesis are results by Ferris et al. (1990) that found that subtle behaviors such as volunteering to help the supervisor led to higher performance ratings and resource provision while more obvious behaviors such as making the supervisor aware of one's accomplishments led to lower performance ratings and resource provision. The skillful gamesman is able to make a distinction between those likely to be effective and those likely to backfire. Further, it appears that the supervisor is able to

make this distinction as well.

Locus of Control

One individual difference variable seemingly ignored by past researchers is locus of control. Ferris et al. (1989b) argued, following Bandura (1977), that those who fundamentally believe they can change their environment (internal locus of control) may be more likely to engage in influence behavior. Accordingly, individuals possessing an internal locus of control would be expected to be more likely to take the initiative in attempting to influence the impression others have of them. On the other hand, those with an external locus of control see themselves as helpless to external events, and would likely see any effort to manage impressions or influence others as futile. While the proposition may seem reasonable, empirical data is needed to test the hypothesis.

Gender

It is clear that women traditionally have operated from inferior power positions in most organizations (Kanter, 1977; Lips, 1981). Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) found that men consistently had greater access to resources for power (e.g., peer networks, mentors) than did women. How this power difference operates on the use of influence tactics is unclear. It may be that women, because they are in a weaker position of power, are more motivated to gain power and use influence tactics to this end. Ferris et al. (1989b) argued for these very power reasons that women are more likely to see their work environment

as political. Although the relationship between politics perceptions and political behavior is unclear, it would be unusual for an individual to behave politically in an environment they perceive as apolitical.

There is some empirical evidence regarding gender effects on influence behavior. Von Baeyer et al. (1981) found that women presented themselves in a more feminine manner when the interviewer possessed such stereotypes about women ("women should be passive, attractive, not independent, and make coffee"). On the other hand, Dipboye and Wiley (1977) found that moderately aggressive female applicants were rated as favorably as moderately aggressive males, and that passive males and females were rated equally negatively by college recruiters. From the perspective of the evaluator, two studies have shown that there is a self-matching bias in performance ratings. Surprisingly, however, both studies found that managers rated same sex subordinates lower than opposite sex subordinates (Izraeli, 1987; Rose & Stone, 1978).

Age

Ferris et al. (1990) argued that age was likely to negatively predict the use of influence tactics. Several studies have reported that a greater degree of influence behavior is perceived to take place at higher levels in the organizational hierarchy (e.g., Gandz & Murray, 1980; Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1980), and one could reasonably assume that position in the hierarchy is positively related to age. However,

research by Kipnis and his colleagues (e.g., Kipnis et al., 1980) would lead one to infer that different tactics of influence are employed in different situations and levels in the organization. Thus, whereas older employees might engage in influence tactics, it is reasonable that they would engage more in the use of direct, logical reasoning approaches than using manipulative, ingratiating types of tactics. However, in the Ferris et al. (1990) study, age failed to predict the use of either job-focused or supervisor-focused influence tactics.

Consequences of Political Influence for P/HRM Activities

Research recently has begun to examine the role of political influence in a number of P/HRM activities, including personnel selection, performance evaluation, promotion and career mobility systems, the feedback process, and compensation decisions and activities.

Personnel Selection

Personnel selection has been a rich area for research on political influence. A useful way to classify research on impression management is by who is doing the managing. Most attention has focused on influence behavior by the applicant, although there has been some attention to how politics might affect managerial selection decisions. In general, almost all research has been conducted on the employment interview. Because of the face-to-face contact and interpersonal dynamics of the interview, this is not surprising. Accordingly, much of the following review focuses on the interview, although as Knouse

(1989) pointed out with the letter of recommendation, the interview is not the only area of the selection process subject to influence behavior.

Applicant impression management. Practitioners in the selection area have long recognized that there is a strong incentive on the part of applicants to actively manage the impressions selection decision-makers form of them. It has been a relatively recent development, however, that researchers investigating selection decisions, particularly the interview, have systematically examined the effect of impression management on selection decisions. Some theoretical works have appeared on the role of impression management in the selection process. For example, Jones and Pittman (1982) and Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) developed taxonomies regarding specific types of behaviors applicants engage in to manage impression in the interview. Tedeschi and Melburg distinguished between assertive (positively projecting a strong image) and defensive (excuse-making and rationalization) influence behaviors. The authors further distinguished between tactical (short-term) and strategic (long-term) focused behaviors. One assertive strategic behavior that has received considerable empirical support is the effect of physical attractiveness (including grooming and attire) on interviewer decisions (Beehr & Gilmore, 1982; Cash, 1985; Dipboye, Arvey, & Terpstra, 1977; Forsythe, Drake, & Cox, 1985; Gilmore, Beehr, & Love, 1986). Gilmore and Ferris (1989b) provided an overview of research on this and the other dimensions

of Tedeschi and Melburg's taxonomy.

It is clear that, in general, impression management by applicants influences interviewer judgments. Virtually every study that has examined impression management in the interview has found an effect. In fact, in a recent study, impression management techniques were found to have a much more powerful effect on interviewer judgments than objective qualifications (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989a).

What may be more important to explore is that different types of influence tactics appear to lead to different outcomes. Baron (1989) recognized this when he argued there is a "too much of a good thing" effect in terms of applicant influence strategies. While the use of impression management may lead to higher evaluations, there is a point at which there is overkill. For example, Baron (1986, 1989) found that both pleasant scent and being well-dressed improved interview judgments when used alone, but when used together led to lower evaluations than causal attire and no scent. Baron's empirical findings are consistent with what common sense would tell us. For example, smiling and eye contact has been found to lead to higher interviewer evaluations of job candidates (Forbes & Jackson, 1980; Imada & Hakel, 1977). However, those individuals that never cease to smile or continually stare at the interviewer would obviously not be highly evaluated!

Managing the perceived similarity between the interviewer and applicant appears to be an important tactic. Baskett (1973),

Frank and Hackman (1973), and Schmitt (1976) all reported that similarity between interviewer and interviewee favorably affected interviewer evaluation of the applicant. Applicant strategies such as agreeing with comments made by the interviewer to promote perceived similarity do seem to improve interviewer evaluations of the applicant. An interesting example of how this similarity process operates is found in the previously cited work of von Baeyer et al. (1981). To review, they found that female applicants attempted to present themselves in a more feminine manner when they knew the interviewer held traditional stereotypes of women. Thus, managing similarity may extend to matching oneself to particular stereotypes.

Interestingly, it appears that, in general, controlling types of influence tactics (dominance, self-promotion, etc.) lead to job applicants being more successful in the interview than applicants who engage in more submissive or passive influence tactics (Dipboye & Wiley, 1977, 1978; Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1990; Tullar, 1989). This runs contrary to conventional wisdom that argues being deferential and tractable to the interviewer is important. On the contrary, it appears that those who "toot their own horn" are the ones that get ahead in the interview, perhaps due to the expectations in this context.

Impression management by selection decision-maker. Up to this point we have dealt only with the applicant side of influence behavior. However, it is important to note that the interviewer or selection decision-maker may also be motivated to

employ, and in fact actively use, influence tactics. As indicated earlier, Gilmore and Ferris (1989b) have argued that managers may prefer individuals similar to themselves. The motive behind this may be political. Perhaps managers like individuals similar to themselves because this allows them to build coalitions and contribute to their own power base. While this does not imply that managers will actually use influence tactics in the selection process, it does suggest that political motives may underlie selection decisions. Wanous (1989) reviewed several studies that found what recruiters say, and how they say it, is important in determining whether the applicant accepts or rejects an offer. The fact that the organizational impressions interviewers projected consistently influenced applicants job choices provides a strong incentive for recruiters and interviewers to use impression management techniques. However, future research needs to address the extent to which interviewers actually do so.

Managing the impression of fit. The significant relationship between perceived similarity and interviewer evaluations was reviewed earlier. Perhaps one of the more important goals of those using influence tactics in the selection process is to increase the evaluator's perception of the fit between the applicant and organization. In concept, this transcends similarity between the interviewer and interviewee to similarity between the applicant and the organization's culture. It may be that the specific influence tactics used depend on the

situation, but the overall goal of enhancing the perception of congruence between the characteristics one has to offer and what the organization values remains the same. Therefore, the notion of fit may hold the promise of explaining how and why individuals seek to manage impression in the interview, and the extent to which they are effective in doing so.

Most writings of fit have been plagued by imprecision, emphasizing nebulous terms such as "right types" (Klimoski & Strickland, 1977; Schnieder, 1987). Rynes and Gerhart (1990) have argued that such notions add little to the understanding of fit. Although it may be nebulous by nature, fit is perhaps best understood as the degree to which the characteristics (dispositional and demographic traits, values and goals) of the applicant or employee match those of employees considered successful in the organization. Because most interviewers probably consider themselves successful employees, this may actually translate into how closely the applicant resembles the interviewer(s).

The inclusion of fit as a criterion in the selection process may relate to organizational strategy. By selecting individuals consistent with overall business strategies, organizational performance may be enhanced. Writers in the strategy area have argued this to be the case (Gupta, 1986; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Szilagyi & Schweiger, 1984). A way to implement strategy is by designing an organization's culture to enhance strategic objectives (Butler et al., 1991). Firms may select employees who

manifestly fit the existing culture. Schein (1990) contended that culture is perpetuated by the selection of new employees who already have the "right" set of beliefs and values. Similarly, others have contended that in order for a corporate culture to flourish, it is important that applicants fit into the existing value system of the organization (Fombrun, 1983).

Research has demonstrated that the extent to which an applicant is perceived to fit the job, culture, or organization substantially increases the applicant's likelihood of receiving a job offer (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). Fit may be inherently vague, which allows it to take a number of forms and permits applicants to play upon this ambiguity and exercise a greater degree of influence over the selection process and outcomes. For example, fit has been viewed as attitude similarity between applicant and interviewer/evaluator, and such perceived similarity in attitudes has been associated with more favorable evaluations (e.g., decisions to hire) of job applicants (e.g., Peters & Terborg, 1975; Schmitt, 1976).

Fit also has been interpreted with respect to appearance, personality, and values, and the extent to which each of these is consistent with some expected or desired level. Molloy (1975) elevated appearance and dress to a higher level in the role it is believed to play in interpersonal evaluations including personnel selection decisions. Recent research has shown that appearance affects interviewer judgments (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990).

The research on fit reviewed earlier suggested that

assessments of fit typically have focused on the personality of the applicant. Organizations certainly differ in their strategic mission. Since differing strategic missions may require individuals possessing particular personality traits, it seems reasonable to expect that overall personality composition of employees significantly differs by organization. As mentioned earlier, several writers in the strategy literature have emphasized that the match between the characteristics of the individual and the strategic characteristics of the organization are of central importance in determining organizational success.

For example, an organization that has typically pursued an aggressive business strategy may be more likely to have aggressive employees. If so, the organization may desire to hire aggressive employees in the future. If the applicant perceived the personality desired, he or she might seek to manage the way in which his or her personality is perceived. If the interviewer, for example, presents the impression that cohesiveness and cooperation is very important to the organization, the applicant may take particular care not to appear aggressive or stubborn.

It may be that personality of the interviewer alone is the dominant effect. The applicant may not be aware of the personality of the other organization members, only the interviewer's. If the interviewer displays certain attributes, the applicant may seek to match the actions that manifest the traits. The interviewer displaying certain actions makes it more

likely that the applicant will act in a reciprocal fashion. Thus, in such cases, the applicant has effectively managed the shared meaning of personality similarity and the interviewer may well recommend hiring due to perceived fit to the job (when it is actually perceived similarity to himself or herself). Research on personality and fit has shown that job applicants that possess personality characteristics congruent with the job for which they are being evaluated tend to be judged as more suitable for that job (Paunonen, Jackson, & Oberman, 1987).

Performance Evaluation, Advancements, and Work Interactions

Performance evaluation. Another very important human resources activity is performance evaluation. Despite the traditional assumption that performance evaluation operates in a quite systematic and rational way, leading to accurate and reliable assessments of "true" performance, this process and its corresponding outcomes are susceptible to considerable influence from nonperformance factors and deliberate manipulations by both evaluators and evaluatees. Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, and Pondy (1989a) provided a conceptual integration of myth systems and politics as a way to better appreciate the richness of intraorganizational contexts. The principal examples used in their analysis were drawn from the design and implementation of a performance evaluation system in an organization, and the political issues brought to light. It has been found that performance evaluation and promotion systems (theoretically linked) frequently are quite political in nature (Longenecker,

Sims, & Gioia, 1987; Longenecker, 1989; Riley, 1983), as was the case in the Ferris et al. study. As was found in the course of this intervention, much of what occurred in the performance evaluation had little to do with the pure accuracy of the appraisal (Kennedy, 1980).

This issue of the non-performance-based nature of performance evaluation systems and the context in which they operate, is an important one and should be pursued further. In her typology of human resource cultures for professionals, Von Glinow (1985) suggested that in cultures characterized by a strong concern for people but weak performance expectations (i.e., "Caring Culture"), performance evaluations tend not to be performance-oriented. Rather, non-performance-related criteria are used, like cooperation, teamwork, and fitting in, and it is quite likely that individuals would be evaluated on the basis of effort instead of results. One might argue that the less objective the performance outcomes of a job, the less sensitive are performance evaluation systems in detecting differences in true or actual work performance. Such systems then would tend to focus on the detection of differences in perceived performance, which can be influenced by symbolic (or political) behavior/performance. It is not surprising that in such situations, people are frequently evaluated on the basis of work effort or attitude (Pfeffer, 1981a).

As noted earlier, the ambiguous nature of work performance as one moves upward in the organization's hierarchy provides the

opportunity for the management of meaning to be effective. As Nemeth and Staw (1989) noted, where performance evaluation and promotion criteria are vague and ambiguous, surrogate criteria emerge in the form of conformity to organization norms and the particular tastes and preferences of one's supervisor. Thus, according to Nemeth and Staw, those seeking favorable performance reviews and upward advancement in such ambiguous circumstances can be expected to carefully monitor their environments and attend to any salient cues regarding supervisor expectations, preferences, and social approval. Ferris et al. (1989b) suggested that when performance outcomes are less easily measured objectively, we tend to focus on employees' behavior rather than their actual results. Pfeffer (1981a) even argued that in such ambiguous situations, we tend to evaluate people on the basis of beliefs, values, and effort. The performance evaluation and promotion system, according to March (1984), then becomes essentially a filter that screens people on the basis of similar attributes (i.e., perceived similarity to some stereotype, to existing managers, or to the person making the evaluation), thus serving to reduce variation and increase homogeneity among managers in the firm.

It appears then that particularly when performance criteria are ambiguous and or subjectively evaluated, there is more of an opportunity for political or opportunistic behavior to occur. Halaby (1978) suggested that under conditions of high professionalization, specialization, and functional complexity

(i.e., nonroutinized), promotion criteria become much more subjective (perhaps providing more of an opportunity for individual candidates to exercise influence over such decisions through politics). Furthermore, Riley (1983) found evidence of considerably more political behavior in nonroutinized versus routinized task environments, particularly noting promotion systems.

Russ (1990) argued that organizations will use output control when performance criteria are objective and measurable, but will shift to behavior control in performance evaluation when outcome criteria are ambiguous, following from the work of Ouchi (1977), Ouchi and Maguire (1975), and Thompson (1967). But rather than a completely deterministic view of control, Russ suggested that managers not only try to enhance others' impressions of them, but also try to influence the criteria by which others judge them. Managers are motivated to protect their managerial discretion (Hambrick & Finkelstein, 1987; Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984). Therefore, managers, knowing that owners' primary interests are in the financial performance of the firm, but also recognizing that organizational outcomes are affected by many factors other than their own efforts, should desire that they be held accountable for performance only to the extent to which performance is under their control. As uncertainty increases and controllability decreases, however, managers will prefer to be evaluated on their behaviors, rather than on organizational outcomes. Under conditions of extreme uncertainty

(e.g., environmental threats, jolts, or crises), even behavior control becomes undesirable. Thompson (1967) noted that as goals and appropriate behaviors become more ambiguous or uncertain, preferred measures of firm effectiveness shift to satisfaction of external constituencies. In other words, as conditions become more uncertain, external legitimacy becomes more important. In the highly uncertain environment, Russ argued that managers will prefer a clan form of control, whereby they are evaluated not on their outcomes or behaviors, but on their intentions and values, and that they will attempt to influence external stakeholders' perceptions of appropriate evaluation criteria through formal organizational communications (e.g., annual reports, press release, etc.).

The implications of a shift to behavior and intentions monitoring, control, and evaluation are important for the demonstration of political behavior in several ways, including through goal setting. Clan and behavior control suggests that people are evaluated on the bases of their norms, beliefs, and values, and perhaps their intentions and effort as well. These are all behaviors or attitudinal indicators that are subjectively determined and thus prone to potential distortion through active political or opportunistic efforts of subordinates (i.e., individuals being evaluated). Pfeffer (1981a) quoted George Gallup as saying: "People tend to judge a man by his goals, by what he is trying to do, and not necessarily by how well he succeeds" (p. 78). Some research has reported results consistent

with this notion. Dossett and Greenberg (1981) found that supervisors gave higher performance ratings to workers who set higher goals than to those who set lower goals, regardless of their actual performance. One might suggest, in light of these notions, that employees might utilize the goal setting process proactively to manage the supervisors' impression that they are ambitious, hard workers, and so forth. Ferris and Porac (1984) tested the notion that the presence of an evaluative observer influences how workers set task goals. They found support for the dual contention that although self-set goals are inflated in the presence of an evaluative observer, such inflation was not associated with an increase in subsequent performance. So, it seems goal setting, (i.e., self-set goals) can be a mechanism for subordinates to nonverbally communicate information to, and thus manage impression of, superiors. Besides communicating high effort, ambition, and so forth, as the Ferris and Porac study implied, Greenberg (1983) examined goal setting as a self-handicapping strategy. The choice of an extremely difficult performance goal allowed individuals to externalize outcomes that might otherwise threaten their self-images, and provided a readily available excuse for poor performance. Further work needs to be conducted to examine the notion that goals can be set publicly for reasons other than self-direction. Recently, Huber, Latham, and Locke (1989) have further examined the role of political influence in goal setting.

Because the evaluation of performance in many jobs is not

amenable to objective assessment and quantification, we find that subjective performance rating by supervisors typically incorporate a variety of nonperformance factors, thus leading to a violation of the most sacred principle of performance evaluation: that we are evaluating performance, not the person in the abstract. The violation of this fundamental principle suggests that factors such as liking, perceived similarity in values, beliefs, and attitudes, and fit may well explain much of the content of performance ratings in organizations. Wayne and Ferris (1990), for example, found that impression management tactics of subordinates contributed to increased liking by the supervisor which led the supervisor to rate the subordinate's job performance more favorably. Graen (1989) suggested that perhaps the most important characteristic bosses look for in subordinates, which leads to these subordinates being evaluated more positively and achieving in-group status, is the extent to which the subordinates think like the boss, make similar decisions, and support the boss on matters of importance to him or her. Furthermore, attitudinal similarity was found by Ross and Ferris (1981) to be associated with higher performance evaluations. These all appear to be characteristics or behaviors that are easily manipulated.

Several other studies have found a relationship between political influence tactics and performance evaluations. Greenberg (1984) suggested that employees inflate performance evaluations and use as a self-serving strategy, and Kipnis and

Schmidt (1988) reported that supervisor ratings of subordinate performance are affected differentially by the type of influence tactic subordinates employ. Ferris, Judge, and Rowland (1990) and Wayne and Ferris (1990) added to these findings by demonstrating that supervisor-focused influence tactics (e.g., ingratiation, etc.) led to subordinates receiving higher performance ratings, but job-focused tactics (e.g., self-promotion) led to lower ratings. Wayne and Kacmar (in press) conducted a laboratory experiment to test the effects of subordinate political influence tactics on both supervisor ratings of subordinate performance and supervisor verbal communication in performance appraisal interviews. Their results supported the favorable effects of influence tactics on both outcomes.

Earlier, Kipnis and Vanderveer (1971) found that a subordinate who engaged in ingratiation received highly positive performance ratings. Contrary to these findings, Fodor (1973a, 1973b, 1974) found that an ingratiator did not receive higher performance ratings in comparison to a noningratiator. In an attempt to explain these contradictory findings, Fodor acknowledged that the ingratiating messages he used were perhaps overly or blatantly ingratiating. This makes sense in light of the notion that as long as intent is disguised or made to appear positive, influence attempts may be effective. However, if the target interprets the attempt as a conscious effort to manipulate, they likely will react negatively. Thus, as argued

by Baron (1986, 1989), political influence attempts can backfire if taken to an extreme.

The foregoing discussion has provided evidence in support of the effectiveness of subordinate political influence tactics on supervisor ratings of subordinate performance, and clearly further research is needed in this area to more precisely delineate the differential effectiveness of a broad array of influence attempts. In addition, however, it is important to note that political influence can generate from the supervisor as well as the subordinate in the performance evaluation process. Research has shown that supervisors may approach the performance evaluation process with personal agenda, and assign performance ratings not on the basis of "real" performance, but rather as a way to maximize their own self interests (e.g., Longenecker, 1989; Longenecker et al., 1987; Martocchio & Ferris, in press; Villanova & Bernardin, 1989). Much more research is needed in this area to expand upon existing findings and extend our understanding of the political rater, as well as the political ratee. Related to this, Greenberg (1988, 1990) has argued that actual fairness or justice is of much less concern to managers than insuring that they manage the impression or image of fairness.

Another area of performance evaluation systems where meanings and the interpretation of outcomes can be manipulated concerns the sources of evaluation, and the increased use of subordinate self evaluations used in conjunction with supervisor

evaluations of the subordinate's performance. The primary focus of both research and practice on self evaluation has concentrated on the extent to which employees are accurate self assessors (Ashford, 1989). A basic assumption about self evaluation, which has probably slowed progress in this area, was that if employees are allowed to evaluate themselves, they will inflate their ratings. In fact, existing research has shown some tendency, on the part of subordinates, to rate themselves lower (not higher) than their supervisors rate them. Such findings can be interpreted in different ways. One interpretation is that when subordinates are given this responsibility they take it seriously and carry it out conscientiously in an effort to provide the most accurate evaluation possible. An alternative interpretation is that subordinates use the self evaluations as an impression management strategy to create a particular impression of themselves for the supervisor. In fact, Teel (1978) argued that subordinates may consciously rate their performance lower in order to gain the praise of the supervisor. Subordinates who convey the impression of being unduly self critical likely find this strategy to be more effective and instrumental in achieving positive evaluations from the supervisor than employing a strategy of inflated ratings. We would likely impute the characteristic of humility to the former and egoism to the later, and we are socialized to react more favorably to a humble person than an arrogant one.

Advancement, mobility, and career progress. Related to performance evaluation activities are the processes involved in intraorganizational mobility; that is, promotions, advancement, and career progress within organizations. In this area, as well, some research has investigated the role of political influence. Pfeffer and Cohen (1984) suggested that the study of internal labor markets should direct its focus on power and influence as key determinants. Furthermore, a number of authors have concluded that promotion systems in organizations can be quite political (e.g., Dyke, 1990; Ferris & Buckley, 1990; Ferris et al., 1989b; Ferris et al., in press; Markham, Hackett, & Harlan, 1987; Riley, 1983), and in the area of management succession, considerable anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that the succession process and decisions are highly political in nature (e.g., Brady & Helmich, 1984; Rowan, 1983; Vance, 1983).

Alternatives to career success, leading to mobility, seem to exist and involve strategies that may be viewed as more political or image-focused than substantive or performance-focused. For example, visibility and exposure (Jennings, 1971), networking (Gould & Penley, 1984), and image building (Heissler & Gemmill, 1978; Larwood & Gattiker, 1983) have been found to bring success in careers. However, Greenhaus (1987) has suggested that career strategies may be differentially effective as a function of a number of factors, such as the norms and practices of the particular organization (Van Maanen, 1980), the nature of the industry (Larwood & Gattiker, 1983), and the type of job or

occupation (Gould & Penley, 1984). Beehr, Taber, and Walsh (1980) investigated employee perceptions of organizational mobility and found that political influence in the form of favoritism was viewed as a prominent mobility channel. Finally, Pfeffer (1989) has recently offered a political perspective on careers and intraorganizational processes that facilitate or hinder mobility.

Supervisor-subordinate interactions. Before leaving this topic, some recent work in two other areas needs to be noted that relates to performance evaluation and advancement. The quality of the supervisor-subordinate working relationship has been a topic of considerable interest to researchers over the years, but recently it has been examined relative to the role of political influence (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Liden & Mitchell, 1989). A couple of empirical studies have reported evidence in support of the role of political influence in such contexts. Ansari and Kapoor (1987) found that student subjects (playing the role of subordinates) reported a willingness and likelihood of using ingratiation tactics directed at their supervisor in order to obtain personal benefits such as career advancement. Also, Wayne and Ferris (1990) found that political influence tactics and performance level affected supervisor-subordinate exchange quality through effects on liking and performance ratings.

Feedback processes. A final related area of recent research activity on political influence concerns the feedback process. In a recent conceptualization, Fedor (1991) noted that political

influence is now generally recognized as an important element in the feedback process. Recent work by several researchers in this area has suggested the various ways political influence dynamics play out in the feedback process (Ashford & Tsui, 1989; Eder & Fedor, 1989; Quinn & Farr, 1989; Wolfe, 1989). Because the situation in which feedback is received can generate considerable uncertainty and anxiety, Fedor (1991) noted that it is ripe for political influence efforts to emerge. Eder and Fedor (1989) have suggested that feedback recipients are likely to formulate strategies which are designed to influence the attributions made by the source (i.e., supervisor) for good or poor performance, strategies found by Wood and Mitchell (1981) to be used by subordinates under conditions of poor performance. Clearly, more research is needed to investigate how political influence strategies are employed in the feedback process. A neglected issue, and one worthy of more precise theoretical and empirical development, concerns the potential ways supervisors might use feedback as a political influence tactic to maximize their own self interest. That is, one typically assumes that a supervisor provides feedback to a subordinate in order to be helpful or assist in bringing about some change in behavior. This, of course, further assumes that the subordinate is the intended target of this effort. It might well be the case that, in such instances, supervisors are "playing to a different audience"; opportunistically, they might be simply "going through the motions" in publicly exhibiting a good supervisory behavior that

will win them favor with their superiors.

In summary, it appears that the intentional management of shared meaning can be played out quite effectively in organizations through the personnel selection, performance evaluation, intraorganizational mobility, and feedback processes. The ambiguous work environmental context regarding both requisite selection criteria and performance indicators provide substantial opportunity for the management of impressions and shared meaning by organizational actors. But these performances rely upon a basic principle of social behavior for their effective execution. That principle is that similarity (perceived or actual) leads to attraction. Byrne (1969) suggested that agreement or perceived similarity leads to attraction because it increases one's confidence that his or her opinions or beliefs are correct. Furthermore, as noted by Nemeth and Staw (1989), ambiguity contributes to uniformity or consensus in beliefs because individuals actively seek consensus in their opinions of ambiguous events.

Compensation

A couple of recent conceptual pieces reviewing two important areas of compensation decisions and systems, merit pay and pay satisfaction, emphasize the role political influence may play in compensation research. Miceli and Lane (1991), in reviewing the antecedents of pay satisfaction, indicated that some employees receive higher pay for reasons other than merit, seniority, and so forth. One of the factors the authors identified that might

explain this was political behavior. Some employees may believe the avenue to higher pay is paved with influence behavior. In the same manner that individuals manage impressions to enhance their performance rating (ingratiation, looking busy, etc.), they may also use influence tactics to obtain higher merit raises. The authors further argued that political behavior may lead to lower pay satisfaction because of this, particularly for those who do not receive rewards for political behavior.

Heneman (1990), in his review of the determinants of merit pay, also reinforced the potential importance of political behavior in compensation. He noted that the relationship between human capital characteristics and merit pay is low. Heneman contended that this relationship might be higher when recipients emphasize the salience and importance of the characteristics to the allocation decision. This is a very interesting possibility. In effect, Heneman was suggesting an interaction between human capital and impression management. If the individual has low human capital, impression management will not matter ("you can't sew a silk purse out of a sow's ear"). On the other hand, for those with high human capital, their superior characteristics and accomplishments may go unnoticed unless they make efforts to point them out to their superiors.

While the above authors have laid out a conceptual basis for impression management in compensation, some empirical work provides evidence regarding the role of political influence in compensation decisions and outcomes. Dreher, Dougherty, and

Whitely (1988) found that upward influence tactics explained a significant amount of the variance in salaries for both men and women, although the effectiveness of specific tactics varied by gender. For men, bargaining tactics resulted in higher salaries. For women, use of reason and logic led to higher salaries, but use of bargaining tactics led to lower salaries.

Gould and Penley (1984) also found that influence behavior was significantly related to salary progression (although no gender differences were investigated). Specifically, the authors found that opinion conformity and other enhancements related to salary progression. Also, Bartol and Martin (1990) found that political connections were instrumental in achieving higher pay raises, but only when the subordinate made a dependency threat.

Kipnis and Schmitt (1988) found differences in the political orientation of individuals. "Shotgun" subordinates (emphasizing assertiveness and bargaining) earned significantly less than "tactician" subordinates (average amount of influence use and emphasizing reason). Freedman (1978), on the other hand, found that strength of the demand for a raise led to higher raises. These two findings might be reconciled in that "shotguns" do not know when to stop being assertive--being overly assertive may be illustrative of Baron's (1989) "too much of a good thing" effect. Freedman's study was only concerned with merit pay decisions. If the people who strongly demanded raises demanded everything else as well (as "shotguns" would do), it could be that their supervisor becomes disgusted with them and allocates them less.

This creates an interesting possibility for future research.

While the above studies suggest a strong relationship between compensation decisions and outcomes and impression management, several studies suggest the contrary. Ross and Ferris (1981) found that attitude similarity between employee and supervisor did not significantly predict salary. The authors findings could be explained by the possibility that self-report attitudes of subordinates may not match with what the supervisor thinks an employee believes. Further, those that manage impressions are unlikely to let the supervisor know what they really think if they believe their supervisor disagrees. This makes quite crucial the authors' failing to measure supervisor's knowledge of (or lack thereof) subordinate beliefs. Martin (1987) found that influence attempts were not significantly better than no action in obtaining pay raises, although an inequity complaint was significantly more successful than ingratiation behaviors.

Several studies have investigated political influences on reward decisions from the perspective of the allocator. Ferris et al. (1989b) suggested that allocators may grant high ratings and large merit increases to recipients in order to convey the impression to the allocator's superiors that the allocators have done an effective job of managing the recipients. Confirming the contention of Ferris et al., Bartol and Martin (1988) found that self-interests of reward allocators influenced reward allocation decisions. Like Ferris et al., Bartol and Martin contended that

reward allocation is used by managers to increase their influence in organizations. Further supporting evidence comes from Finkelstein and Hambrick (1989) who found that CEO pay was significantly influenced by the power of the CEO. While not explicitly relating to the use of influence tactics, it does suggest that the degree of influence of individuals is likely to affect the compensation they draw. Finally, Benson and Hornsby (1988) found that influence tactics were present in job evaluation committees, suggesting that job evaluators may issue ratings based on a political agenda.

Department- and Organization-Level Political Influence

Whereas much of the foregoing review, analysis, and discussion has focused primarily on the individual-level of analysis in political influence efforts, some work also has been done that examines political influence at department, unit, or group levels, and at the organization level. Russ (1990) has shown how organizations attempt to shape reality for their constituency, and thus enhance their image, through symbolic use of formal communications. In addition to research by Russ (1990), others have shown that organizations make active efforts to manage the impressions of their major constituencies concerning the organizations' performance (Bettman & Weitz, 1983; Salancik & Meindl, 1984; Staw, McKechnie, & Puffer, 1983). Somewhat related to this work are several efforts aimed at providing a better understanding of how organizations seek to establish, as well as re-establish, legitimacy, employing various

means including symbolic communication and political influence (e.g., Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; King, 1991).

Bacharach and Lawler (1980), among others, have directed their interests in political influence at the group, unit, or department level. Also, recent work by Frost (1989), Russ (1986) and Martocchio and Ferris (in press) has adopted this same level of analysis in exploring the potential implications of political influence in the P/HRM function's efforts to increase its perceived importance and contribution.

It seems clear that much more work is needed at both group- and organization-levels of analysis directed at developing a better understanding of such political influence dynamics. Of particular interest is the improved image, status, and importance of the P/HRM function in organizations today (e.g., Butler et al., 1991; Rowland & Ferris, 1982), and the question concerning to what extent that improved image is a function of purely substantive contributions versus how much is the result of active and successful symbolic/political influence strategies employed by P/HRM.

Perceptions of Political Influence

The major focus of this review has been directed at the nature of political influence and how it affects important P/HRM decisions and activities. Studies reviewed have investigated the effects of political influence on the personnel selection process, performance evaluations, promotion systems, intraorganizational mobility and career advancement, feedback

processes, and compensation decisions. In addition, research has shown that political influence tactics or behaviors can be seen as reactions to stress (Mayes & Ganster, 1988) and job dissatisfaction (Farrell, 1983).

A small but growing body of theory and research has considered a slightly different perspective on political influence which has focused on perceptions of politics. The question of interest here seems to be what are the antecedents and consequences of an individual perceiving their work environment as being political? This area is quite pertinent to our present discussion of P/HRM decisions and activities because the very nature of how those activities and decisions are carried out (not just their outcomes, but the process as well) would be expected to influence employee perceptions of political activity. Unfortunately, little work to date has been published other than recent theoretical and empirical efforts by Ferris and his colleagues (Ferris et al., 1989a, 1989b; Ferris & Kacmar, 1989; Ferris, Gilmore, & Kacmar, 1990; Kacmar & Ferris, in press; Wayne, Kacmar, & Ferris, 1989), and several other empirical studies (Gandy & Murray, 1980; Madison et al., 1980). This area of research is a bit different than the other two because it suggests that organizational politics is a subjective perception, not necessarily an objective reality. While one would assume that typically there is a strong correspondence between actual political behavior (i.e., to the extent that an indication of "objective" political behavior could be obtained) and behavior

that is perceived as political, it must be acknowledged that perceptual differences occur and it is important to try to better understand how and why this happens.

Organizational scientists have long argued the distinction between objective and perceived work environments (e.g., James & Jones, 1974; Naylor, Pritchard, & Ilgen, 1980; Schneider, 1975). More recently, arguments have been made that work environments are molded by the types of people attracted and granted entry (Schneider, 1987), that both selection and socialization processes contribute to political environments (Ferris et al., 1989a, 1989b), and that some organizational environments are more political than others (Riley, 1983).

However, in this area of research, the perspective was first articulated by Gandz and Murray (1980), who suggested that rather than an objective state, organizational politics is best conceived as a state of mind. Many years ago, Lewin (1936) suggested the very important notion that people respond on the basis of their perceptions of reality, not reality per se, and later on, Porter (1976) argued that perceptions are important to study and to understand, even if they are misperceptions of actual events, with particular reference to organizational politics. Furthermore, researchers interested in other aspects of work environments (e.g., organizational climate), in discussing true versus perceived attributes, have argued for a definition of work environments based on perceived attributes (James & James, 1989; Naylor et al., 1980; Schneider, 1975).

In summary, then, the interest here is to conceptualize and investigate the nature of perceptions of political influence. Themes and issues emerge from existing theory and research concerning just what constitutes political influence in organizations. Researchers here are interested in the cognitive evaluation and subjective experience of those behaviors and events occurring in the work environment that seem to constitute political behavior. The only conceptual model of politics perceptions known has been proposed recently by Ferris et al. (1989b). However, this conceptualization should serve as merely a starting point in moving toward a more comprehensive and precise model and understanding of how perceptions of political influence actually operate. Also, such comprehensive and precise efforts in this area should lead to a clearer picture of exactly how P/HRM decisions and activities affect perceptions of organizational politics.

Future Considerations

The purpose of this Yearly Review was to examine the field of P/HRM from a political influence perspective as an effort to expand upon our understanding of the underlying dynamics of P/HRM decisions and activities in organizations. As noted in the foregoing sections of this article, some research has been conducted in this broad area, but both theoretical and empirical developments are seriously needed. In this final section, several observations are made regarding both challenging issues facing this area, as well as future directions for research.

Whereas it was not the intention of this review to resolve the definitional problem for the political influence construct, this does pose a challenge for future research. In reviewing the research examining political influence in addition to the definitions cited, several issues seem to emerge and can be collectively organized in an effort to develop a more informed understanding of the political influence construct. First, there appears to be an assumption of intentionality in the demonstration of political behavior. While this may be a less critical issue for some, we believe it is important for how perceivers cognitively evaluate the observed event (i.e., the political behavior exhibited).

A second issue emerging from the existing evidence pertains to level of analysis. It appears that political behavior is demonstrated by individuals, groups, and organizations. Furthermore, Ferris et al. (1989b) argued that because similar types of political behaviors are likely used by individuals, groups, and organizations, they saw no particular theoretical advantage at present in distinguishing among the various levels in their definition of organizational politics. While within-level research on political influence should continue at all three levels, such proposed cross-level similarities in specific types of behaviors and tactics should only help in developing a more general, multi-level theory of political influence in organizations.

A third notion that can be extracted is that the very nature

of political influence reflects a social influence process, both in terms of the conditions under which political behaviors are likely to occur (Fandt & Ferris, 1990; Ferris & Mitchell, 1987; Ferris & Porac, 1984, Pfeffer, Salancik, & Leblibici, 1976), and the actual demonstration and consequences of such behavior (Allen et al., 1979; Ferris et al., 1989b; Porter et al., 1981).

Finally, a fourth issue concerns the extent to which political behavior is necessarily good or bad. In general, it is fair to say that individuals tend to interpret the term "organizational politics" negatively, perhaps due to the imputation of malintent to the individual engaging in such behaviors. However, the existing theory and research would imply that politics can be either good or bad, in perception and outcome. Of course, the more precise issue is "good or bad for whom"; the individual? the group? the organization? The positive or negative organizational consequences of political influence have been explored in only a limited fashion, with conflicting arguments resulting. Pfeffer (1981b) has suggested that political influence is necessary for organizations to survive and be effective, while Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) found that political influence was associated with the poor-performing, not the high-performing firms in their sample.

Related to this last issue is the work being done on perceptions of political influence. The issue of how "objective" political influence attempts are perceived by others and thus the subjectively experienced meaning of organizational politics

perceptions bears more careful examination in future theory and research. One might necessarily assume that what are regarded "objectively" as political behaviors necessarily will be regarded as such and lead to negative perceptions and consequences for bystanders. Wayne, Kacmar, and Ferris (1989) investigated how subordinate influence attempts directed at a supervisor would affect coworkers in the work group. Interestingly, the ingratiation efforts of the subordinate (directed toward the supervisor) affected coworkers favorably, not unfavorably as one might expect, leading to increased satisfaction. While these results might appear counterintuitive, they make more sense upon closer examination. As Wayne et al. pointed out, observing a subordinate exhibiting influence tactics toward a supervisor may well be construed as manipulative by onlookers, but the term "manipulative" has two quite different definitions as mentioned by Owen (1986). In citing Webster's Seventh dictionary, he presented the following two definitions: (1) "manage or utilize skillfully"; (2) "to control or play upon as artful, unfair, or insidious means." Thus, it appears that one might react positively or negatively depending on which definition they employ. Furthermore, the triggering mechanism that might determine which definition of manipulation one adopts might be the particular type of influence tactics employed by the actor. All political behaviors are neither equally effective nor similarly perceived. It has been found that ingratiation types of political behaviors tend to be positively associated with

performance ratings given by supervisors (Ferris et al., 1990; Kipnis & Vanderveer, 1971), likely operating on such outcomes through their effects on affect or liking. Whereas, other types of political behaviors that emphasize entitlements (i.e., claiming responsibility for positive events) can be risky because the manipulator may be perceived as egotistical, thus leading to a negative impression and negative affect (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). In fact, such tactics have been found to be inversely related to performance ratings (Ferris et al., 1990; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne & Kacmar, in press).

Further refinements in the analysis of organizational politics perceptions, their meaning, and their underlying dynamics have been suggested recently. Ferris et al. (1989b) argued that whether politics perceptions lead to negative or positive outcomes is a function of whether they are perceived as a threat (i.e., to fear and be intimidated by) or as an opportunity on which to capitalize. Essentially, this perspective would suggest that individuals cognitively evaluate such situations in terms of whether the particular work environmental features or activities (i.e., in this case, politics) are personally detrimental or personally beneficial, and subsequent affect and behavior follow from that initial cognitive evaluation. This is precisely the point that James and James (1989) made recently in their analysis of work environment perceptions.

As we have seen, organizational politics is a complex

multidimensional construct, and one which is in desperate need of more precise insight and articulation. We provided an analysis of how shared meaning is manipulated as providing the background in which politics are played out in P/HRM activities in an effort to add to our understanding of this complex process. Continued efforts are needed to better establish the definition, limits, and construct validity of political influence before major advances will be made in understanding how political influence affects P/HRM.

A number of methodological problems need to be considered and addressed in future research investigating political influence in P/HRM. One is the potential social desirability bias inherent in research on "sensitive topics." That is, positivity response bias is likely to result when research participants are asked questions regarding the extent to which they engage in political behaviors; primarily because most people perceive "politics" in the pejorative sense. Alternative, or multiple, sources should be considered. Judge (1990), for example, used "significant other" evaluations in tandem with self-report evaluations of the focal employee's disposition. Such an approach might be well-suited for research on political influence individual differences and behaviors as well.

A second problem concerns the nearly exclusive use of cross-sectional research designs in this area. Yet, it appears that we will only begin to really understand how political influence effects promotions, intraorganizational mobility, and career

advancement when we start conducting longitudinal research.

A third issue in need of being addressed is to consider the possibility of not simply linear, but also curvilinear relationships between political influence tactics and P/HRM decisions and outcomes. If the "blatant" influence attempts suggested by Fodor (1974), and the "too much of a good thing" notion of Baron (1986, 1989) do, in fact, backfire, we need to test for curvilinearity and identify the inflection in the curve.

A fourth and much more difficult problem is to address the "form versus substance" issue (Ferris & King, 1990), and begin to better understand and more precisely articulate the performance construct. Clearly, the very essence of performance evaluation systems, which serve as the basis for many important P/HRM decisions, necessitates and assumes that work performance is an objective reality, which can be accurately observed and evaluated. Even assuming such a fixed target, the predictive validities obtained using various instruments and measures to predict work performance tend not to be overly impressive. The foregoing discussion of active political influence attempts by employees designed to manage impressions of their performance suggests, instead of a fixed target and objective reality, that performance becomes a moving target and a socially constructed reality. Thus, efforts need to be made to better define the nature of job performance for a variety of different jobs in which objective, quantifiable criteria are not available.

Compounding this problem of performance measurement is the rapid

movement or fast track philosophies of many organizations. A fast track system involving quick movement potentially encourages at least as much symbolic behavior (perhaps political in nature) as actual effective performance. Because one is in a particular job or position a reasonably short period of time, and because standards of performance on such jobs are ambiguous at best, individuals are likely to be evaluated more on how much it appears that they are contributing than on the basis of their actual (objective) performance level (Pfeffer, 1981a).

Thompson, Kirkham, and Dixon (1985) also have discussed the potentially dysfunctional consequences of a fast track system. They argued that such a system forces managers to focus on engaging in highly visible activities that produce dramatic results, and in the shortest possible time frame. It seems that rapid movement through a series of jobs does not permit enough time in grade to develop one's skills and competencies to the fullest, thus raising serious questions concerning the long-term contributions being made by people in such a system. Furthermore, because the very nature of the system seems to encourage perhaps more symbolic and political behavior than substantive contribution, the performance construct will likely remain obscure and open to manipulation and distortion.

The nature of political influence in P/HRM decision contexts represents an important area that we've just begun to delve into, but which is in need of much more theory and research. In fact, it seems that theory and research in this area have lagged

considerably behind the practical realization that political influence is a fact of life in organizations, and operates to affect key P/HRM activities (e.g., Graen, 1989; Jackall, 1983, 1988; Kanter, 1977; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Kelly, 1988; Kennedy, 1980; Maccoby, 1978). The characterization of interpersonal political interactions, by Goffman (1959), as actors playing out scripted roles on a stage also has been employed by Schlenker (1980), and more recently by Ferris et al. (in press) as applied to the P/HRM context. It seems that a major challenge for P/HRM theory and research is to develop a more informed understanding of the roles being played by organizational actors (scripted and improvisational), as well as the stage on which the performances take place, if we are to contribute meaningfully to our knowledge base concerning the dynamics of political influence in P/HRM decisions and activities. The political influence perspective, thus, appears to offer considerable potential for P/HRM theory and research.

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