Patterns of Political Behavior in Organizations¹

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This paper suggests that despite the current renaissance of interest in organizational power and politics, organization theory neglects individual political behavior within organizations. The need for a concern for individual political behavior is explored, and three key dimensions of political behavior are suggested: internal-external, vertical-lateral, and legitimate-illegitimate. A typology based on these dimensions is proposed, and predictions about the different types of political behavior are offered.

Now that organizational scholars have discovered and explored the environment, the new growth stock appears to be organizational politics. A host of recent works (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Gandz & Murray, 1980; Mayes & Allen, 1977; Pfeffer, 1978, 1981; Tushman, 1977) have attempted to remedy the neglect of power and politics that scholars such as Mowday (1978) and Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes (1980) have seen as characteristic of the organizational literature. Despite this upsurge of attention to politics, some aspects of political phenomena continue to be neglected in the organizational literature. This paper argues for the theoretical importance of individual political behavior, proposes three key dimensions of political behavior, and suggests a typology derived from these dimensions. Also, variables useful for predicting the form of individual political actions are suggested.

The current wave of literature on organizational power and politics may be viewed best as a "rediscovery" of politics in organizations. Issues of power and politics within organizations were central to classic organizational writers such as Weber and Michels. The development of scientific management and human relations schools, with their managerial perspectives, diverted attention to motivation and productivity. Only rarely did

'The authors wish to thank Jean Ramsey, John Rizzo, and Linda Rouse for their comments on an earlier draft of the paper. organizational scholars return to the issues of power and politics—for example, March (1962), and Mechanic (1962)—until the renaissance of such literature in the late 1970s.

It is difficult to account for the timing of this rediscovery. The authors do not share a single paradigm and many of the papers are, in fact, largely descriptive rather than explicitly theoretical. It is suspected, however, that among the factors behind the revival of interest in organizational power and politics is the penetration of organizations by employees socialized into politics during the protests of the 1960s. Further, political behavior in organizations recently has been highlighted against a societal background of decreasing trust in authority and by an increase in journalistic revelations of wrongdoing. Within the scholarly literature there has been an increase in Marxist and conflict theories of organizations (see the special issue of Sociological Quarterly, Winter, 1977). Pfeffer, for example, has observed that the dominant managerial perspective within organizational studies has neglected "one of the most important issues and activities-the conflict in preferences among organizational participants and the resulting contest over the organization" (1978, p. 29). Also, the various attacks-for example, March and Olsen (1976) and Weick (1979)-on the goal approach and the general rational model of organizations may have made political models of organizations seem more rele-

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