



**How Frequent is Organizational
Political Behavior?**
A Study of Managers' Opinions at 491 Workplaces

by

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1 Executive Summary

This article investigates the extent to which Swedish managers have reported that political behavior existed at their companies during change activities. Several scientific case studies lend support to the change management writers who argue that political behavior is an important factor in organizational change. There is, however, a lack of studies that use large samples and quantitative analysis methods which report upon observations of concrete actions. This study was thus designed to report upon observed political behaviors from 491 workplaces in Sweden. The results showed that the explored political behaviors existed at 95% of the workplaces, but only to a moderate extent. The article also reports upon the kind of political behaviors that were most frequent, with the authors discussing how managers, industry and the academic system could use these findings in order to become aware, better prepared and more able to handle organizational politics and political behavior.

2 Introduction

For a long time, it has been known to science that there are ‘officially’ sanctioned ways of carrying out change in organizations. An overwhelming part of the change literature deals with describing these overt change methods. The ‘unofficial’, non-sanctioned ways, on the other hand, introduced into the literature by Machiavelli, have not been explored to the same extent (Collins, 1998). As Buchanan and Badham put it; “we perhaps like to think of our social and organizational cultures as characterized by order, rationality, openness, collaboration and trust. The reality is different. Competition sits alongside co-operation. Informal ‘backstaging’ supports public action. We see self-interest, deceit, subterfuge and cunning, as well as the pursuit of moral ideals and high aspirations” (Buchanan and Badham, 1999 pp1). March and Olson (1983) categorized discussions on organizational change into *the rhetoric of administration* and *the rhetoric of realpolitik*. The former deals with structures, procedures, efficiency, effectiveness, planning, economy and control, while the latter deals with political struggle, competing interests and dominance. As the label realpolitik implies, this describes matters which may not be evident to an observer. There are arguments that any pursuer of change needs to both recognize and exercise realpolitik, but there are not so many empirical studies that have shown to the extent to which such realpolitik is being practiced in organizations.

A common label for covert organizational behavior intended to support the interests of individuals or groups at the expense of others is organizational politics. When matters of organizational politics are discussed, defensive mechanisms, interaction patterns and action routines are engaged, as we are unwilling to reveal any political actions regarding ourselves (Gandz and Murray, 1980, Kylén, 1999). In fact, we might not even recognize such undiscussable behaviors in ourselves (Argyris et al., 1985). In 2001, the author of this paper attended a lecture by David Buchanan on the need for people pursuing change in organizations to both recognize and play organizational politics. The audience included ten managers from large Swedish

corporations. When our British lecturer argued that any agent of major change must expect to be subjected to the deceitful games of others, many of the managers protested that such behavior is not accepted in an egalitarian society such as Sweden and is thus very rare. The lecturer's response was two-fold; firstly, this reaction is common at all his seminars, held in several European countries as well as in the US; and secondly, that he saw no particular differences in the actual levels of organizational politics in the different change management teams in which he had acted as a consultant. In his opinion, organizational politics is a universal and commonplace phenomenon in organizations.

This is an interesting quote from a practicing academic. A literature search regarding the levels of organizational politics occurring during change neither supports nor rejects this. In fact, no recent explorative studies spanning different contexts or organizations were found at all. Since several writers argue that skill in organizational politics is an important quality in managing change (e.g. Buchanan and Badham, 1999, Huczynski, 1996, Peled, 2000, Pinto, 2000), it is of interest to know to which extent and under which circumstances such activities occur.

3 Purpose and Aim of the Study

The purpose of this article was to explore to what extent organizational politics exist in Swedish companies. This was done by using a questionnaire filled out by managers from a randomized sample of Swedish organizations. The study would find out to what extent managers recognize political behaviors in their organizations. The aim was also to investigate what kind of political behavior was most frequent and whether there were differences in the levels of political behavior that were due to the line of business, organizational size and ownership.

4 Theoretical Background of Political Behavior

The fundamental driver of organizational politics is conflict of interest (Pfeffer, 1981). Miles (1980) found that political activities occur in the presence of ambiguous goals, scarce resources, changes in technology or environment, non-programmed decisions, or organizational change. All these five prerequisites in some way relate to uncertainty, which may serve as a basis for conflicts of interest. As uncertainty will occur in any active organization, we can expect to find organizational politics there. Stacey (1996) wrote that all organizations, apart from their legitimate system, also have a shadow system which exercises illegitimate behavior, which will dodge any attempt at regulation. Thus, an organization without organizational politics would have to be one without either norms or rules, or one with unbreakable norms or rules. Perrow (1979) argued that such an organization would have to be either fully automated or fully professionalized. According to Stacey (1996), there is a difference between overt opposition and resistance, which typically occur when rationality alone cannot settle a dispute between competing arguments, or covert the politics which are exercised when the actors fear failure or embarrassment. When studying cases of change in service organizations, Pichault (1995) found that the reactions of the

imposed changes were not only dependent on the power distributions within the organization but also on the way the change was handled. This supports a description of a change process as social, symbolic and political at the same time, and where the actors are able to manipulate the perception of the change by others (Brown, 1994, Brown, 1995).

The constructive qualities of organizational politics were one important design in the Model of Organizational Politics Perceptions (Ferris et al., 1989b), a research model which has drawn the attention of the majority of studies of organizational politics. Central to this model is the Perceptions of Organizational Politics (POPS) scale (Kacmar and Ferris, 1991), originally a 31-item measurement (with derivatives of 40, 12 and 5 items), dealing with unfair qualities of organizational life such as repression of speech, unjust appraisals and promotion, impression management, and lack of peer support. The studies found in the literature review, which were based on the 31-item scale, reported similar means for this measurement (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992, Gilmore et al., 1996, O'Connor and Morrison, 2001), while those based on the 12-item derivative (Kacmar and Ferris, 1991) show remarkable differences (Cropanzano et al., 1997, Hochwarter et al., 1999, Kacmar et al., 1999, Randall et al., 1999, Valle and Perrewe, 2000, Valle and Witt, 2001, Vigoda, 2000a, Witt et al., 2000). The POPS studies have examined a number of antecedents, moderators, and outcomes of perceptions of organizational politics in mainly American organizations.

While the Model of Organizational Politics has contributed greatly to the investigation of perceptions of politics in organizations, the study of actual political behavior has largely been overlooked (Valle and Perrewe, 2000). Harrell-Cook, Ferris, and Dulebohn (1999) investigated the moderating influence of self-promotion and ingratiation in the Organizational Politics Perceptions Model (Ferris et al., 1989b) in a US hospital. Similarly, Valle and Perrewe (2000) investigated the moderating influence of different proactive and reactive political behaviors in the Organizational Politics Perceptions Model in six US organizations. The two groups of political behaviors differed in a number of ways. While proactive political behaviors correlated positively with the hierarchical level and gender of the respondent, reactive political behaviors showed no such significant correlation. Neither the centralization of power nor the formalization of the organization showed any significant correlation to any of the political behaviors. The significant negative correlation between reactive political behaviors and POPS supports earlier arguments that perceptions of an organization as political and actual political behaviors of individuals are two distinct phenomena (Harrell-Cook et al., 1999).

The research field of perceived organizational politics has received some criticism. After reviewing the results of 25 studies which used the POPS measurement, Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, and Ammeter (2002) noticed conflicting findings regarding the dimensionality of the measurement. The application of different subscales also hinders comparisons between the studies. Ferris et al also note that the 'tone of measurement' influences the results; while the POPS scale tends to measure

bad politics, a measure developed by Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner (1994) included items such as "I have learned how things really work on the inside of this organization" and "I know who the most influential people are in my organization" (Ferris et al., 2002 p221). The results of the Chao et al study (1994) showed a positive correlation between politics and job satisfaction (not negative, as usually found). According to Fedor and Maslyn (2002), the predominantly negative view of politics is somewhat consistent with the view of its underlying driver, the conflict of interest; the general notion is that the less that it take place - the better. However, within the conflict literature, it has been realized that some level of conflict is important for organizations. Turning to the constructive element of perceived politics, it is recognized that an individual's perception of any situation as political is dependant on the outcomes of that situation; "If things are not good, they must be political" (Fedor and Maslyn, 2002 p276). Dipboye and Bigazzi Foster (2002) support this by warning that the layperson may use many alternate definitions of organizational politics than used by researchers.

Another category of theory regards organizational politics during change. In their exploration of the topic, Frost & Egri (1991) argue that change must lead to an increase in political behavior due to the nature of change itself, overturning the rules and routines of stability. If nothing particular is going on, there is much less to politicize about. Any administrative innovation, at its core, is about ambiguity and is replete with disputes, due to the different perspectives of the ones taking part in the innovation and the changes it induces. Innovation and change must therefore be considered a political as well as a social process (Frost and Egri, 1991). Buchanan and Boddy (1992) write that the political resistance evoked by a change depends on both the magnitude of the change and its epicenter; thus, an incremental change on the periphery of the organization will create less political resistance than a radical change in the core business of the organization. Kylén (1999) found that reactive political behaviors (tactics) in a group subjected to change were more frequent when the leadership style was of a *laissez-faire* style; groups with leaders who were more decisive and caring exercised less reactive political (tactical) behaviors, according to Hershey and Blanchard's taxonomy (1982). This reciprocal influence between leaders and followers is taken into account by the emerging model of Ammeter et al (2002), where the political behaviors of leaders are influenced by both leader attributes and the attributes of the target of influence. Both of these are in turn influenced by organizational attributes and history, allowing for changes in political leadership behavior due to the outcomes of earlier political attempts. Thus, political behavior is expected to be dependant on both the situational and cultural factors of the organization.

Normative literature advises practitioners to take organizational politics into account to improve change performance (e.g. Pinto, 2000, Buchanan and Boddy, 1992). Behind these arguments lies the assumption that a change agent will fail should he or she neither care to recognize nor oppose political resistance, among the other actors, induced by the change attempt. Some writers even argue that major change attempts

must be supported by the use of proactive political behaviors (Buchanan and Badham, 1999, Peled, 2000). This is in line with findings regarding political behavior among the project managers of successful product development projects. Ollila, Norrgren and Schaller (Ollila et al., 2001) found that proactive political behaviors were preferred by the project managers of projects characterized by high uncertainty and high complexity; while on the contrary, project managers of low uncertainty and low complexity projects only responded with political behavior when their projects were being politically challenged, or they exercised no political behaviors at all. A number of qualitative studies, e.g. Ollila's et al, have been carried out whereby the behavior of change agents and other interest holders has been studied. However, there have been few attempts to explore how much informal, political behavior takes place during change in a number of organizations from several lines of business. We can expect different lines of business to differ to some extent in the amount of exercised political behavior, as situational factors such as the degree of formalization and uncertain context differ. In particular, we can expect public organizations to hold a smaller degree of such political behaviors, which are suppressed by formalization (Miles, 1980, Mintzberg, 1983, Vigoda, 2000b). Younger and smaller organizations are less formalized, Mintzberg (1983). On the other hand, as organizational politics is a covert activity, it is hard to perform politics undetected in a small organization, which is under more social control. Also, as change is hard to regulate, a measure of organizational politics during change may detect unregulated activities even in large organizations. Thus, the relationship between organizational size and political behaviors is difficult to predict.

5 Method

Questionnaires were distributed to a stratified sample of 491 Swedish workplaces where either the president, vice president or human resources manager were asked to respond to a number of questions concerning work for change in human and organizational development. A response rate of 63% was achieved. The selection was performed by the national statistics bureau of Sweden, Statistics Sweden (www.scb.se). The survey was carried out between April and August 1999. The demographics are described in Table I.

TABLE I
Response Rate and Demographics

	%
Response rate ¹	
Overall	63.1
Demographics ²	
Female respondent	30.7
Respondent aged 40-59	82.2
Less than 100 employees	52.5
Between 100 and 499 employees	35.9
More than 500 employees	11.2
Private company	40.6
Public organization	57.4
Healthcare or educational organization	34.0
Expansive market situation	45.5
Shrinking market situation	10.2
# employees up over last 2 years	39.9
# employees down over last 2 years	34.7

¹ Relative to number of sent questionnaires

² Relative to number of received responses

5.1 Measuring political behavior

The questionnaire used for this study, entitled “Effects of Work for Change on Human and Organizational Development”, was developed in previous studies by Norrgren (1995) and Norrgren, Hart and Schaller (1997) and its purpose was to cover a large number of aspects of change. The questionnaire consisted of more than 200 items. Most of these items had four responses (ranked by codification value); (1) ‘Not at all’, (2) ‘To a fairly low extent’, (3) ‘To a fair extent’, and (4) ‘To a very great extent’.

This study facilitates a political behavior index aiming to explore five individual political actions that may be used reactively or defensively, to resist change (Valle and Perrewe, 2000). As with any empirical studies of organizational politics, we face some methodological problems. Firstly, as politics is considered a taboo subject, the respondents might not reveal their innermost thoughts to others. Gandz and Murray (1980) suggest solving this problem by asking the subjects about their opinions of the political maneuverings of others, advice adopted in designing the instrument of this study. Secondly, there are a large number of possible covert counter-measures to change (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992). To avoid respondent fatigue, the number of items in individual aspects had to be kept low, when considering the other aspects explored by the instrument. The five political actions to be mirrored in the five items were selected among from Buchanan (1999). They were assumed to be among the most frequent legal defensive political activities (Ralston et al., 1994) in Swedish organizations. The five items, labeled “To what extent do the phenomena given below occur at your workplace in connection with work for change?”, were (translated from Swedish):

- a) The actual decisions are taken informally and privately
- b) Passive resistance is deliberately used to tire those people out who pursue work for change
- c) Important key persons say one thing while their actions convey something completely different
- d) Lobbying activities occur to try to get influential individuals to think in a certain way
- e) Certain individuals or groups try to hinder the work by means of formalism and bureaucracy

These five items represent behaviors that are important to recognize when managing change and should describe “how things really work on the inside of this organization” (Ferris et al., 2002 p221). Presumably, these behaviors are not sanctioned by the legitimate systems of the organizations (Stacey, 1996). Thus, they fit the definition of organizational politics as non-sanctioned means or ends (Mayes and Allen, 1977).

The label of the five items was to which extent each of them occurred during change work. An index was created, consisting of all five items ($\alpha = .69$). Although acceptable, this alpha value is less than excellent and indicates that such a measurement of different, distinct behaviors does not necessarily have one-dimensional characteristics (Robinson et al., 1991). The index was validated through principal component factor analysis, using Varimax rotation and extracting for eigenvalues greater than one. This resulted in a single component accounting for 45.7% of the variance.

An additional measure, ‘some kind of political behavior’, was created, not by the mean (like the index), but by the maximum of the five items. For this measure, a

value of four means that the respondent has found that at least one of the individual political behaviors occurs to a very great extent, while a value of one means that the response “not at all” was used for all five items.

5.2 Line of Business, Organizational Size and Ownership

We will also investigate whether there are differences in the levels of political behavior sample which are dependent on:

- The line of business of each organization (see Table II), an attribute of the registry of Statistics Sweden, originating from the national treasury.
- Organizational size (“How many people work at your workplace”), which had seven response alternatives (ranked by codification value): (1) less than 50; (2) 50-99; (3) 100-149; (4) 150-299; (5) 300-499; (6) 500-999; and (7) 1000 or more.
- Ownership situation (“What is the ownership situation at your workplace?”), which was investigated using a couple of check boxes (“The unit is/is part of a private company” and “The unit is part of a public administration/authority”). Two percent of the respondents left both boxes blank.

6 Results

The result shows, from an overall level when observing the calculated measure ‘some kind of political behavior’ that 95% of the respondents report political behavior being present in their organization to a fairly low, fair or a very great extent. 48% hosted some kind of political behavior to a very great extent or to a fair extent, while only 6% of the organizations hosted some kind of political behavior to a very great extent. The number of respondents reporting political behavior to *a very great extent* is very low. The Political Behaviors index correlated significantly ($r=.20$ $p<.01$) with the number of employees at the workplace. At this aggregated level, no significant differences were found between publicly and privately owned organizations, or between individual lines of business.

TABLE II
Descriptives of Political Behaviors, and Radical Change

	n	M	SD
Political Behaviors	301	1.89	.48
Political Behaviors by Line of Business			
Agriculture and Forestry	2	1.80	.57
Mining	1	2.20	
Manufacturing	62	1.88	.48
Energy and Water Supply	3	2.60	.53
Building	13	2.06	.34
Wholesale and Retail	19	1.94	.60
Hotels and Restaurants	5	1.60	.62
Transportation, Storage and Communications	20	1.92	.41
Finance	5	2.08	.51
Real Estate, Rental, and IT	28	1.84	.47
Public Service	35	1.95	.53
Education	44	1.90	.45
Health Services	57	1.81	.50
Other societal and personal services	7	1.74	.34
Political Behaviors by Ownership			
Public organizations	172	1.89	.48
Privately owned organizations	123	1.90	.48

Turning to individual items, the most frequent organizational political behavior was; ‘The actual decisions are taken informally and privately’, which occurs in 77% of the organizations. The next most frequently occurring political action was; ‘Lobbying activities occur to try to get influential individuals to think in a certain way’, which

occurs in 75% of the organizations. The least frequently occurring behavior was; 'Passive resistance is deliberately used to tire those people out who pursue work for change', which occurs in 60% of the organizations. It is interesting to note that, for two items ('The actual decisions are taken informally and privately' and 'Lobbying activities occur to try to get influential individuals to think in a certain way'), 24% of the respondents reported them as occurring to a very great extent or to a fair extent. The most frequent response was *fairly low*, and the second most frequent was *not at all*.

TABLE III
Descriptions of Individual Political Behaviors

To what extent do the phenomena given below occur at your work place in connection with work for change?	Overall		Individual response alternatives			
	M	SD	To a very great extent	To a fair extent	To a fairly low extent	Not at all
A - The actual decisions are taken informally and privately	2.03	.74	2.3%	21.3%	53.0%	23.3%
B - Passive resistance is deliberately used to tire those people out who pursue work for change	1.74	.71	1.0%	12.7%	45.8%	40.5%
C - Important key persons say one thing while their actions convey something completely different	1.89	.69	1.7%	14.0%	55.7%	28.7%
D - Lobbying activities occur to try to get influential individuals to think in a certain way	2.01	.74	2.0%	21.7%	51.5%	24.7%
E - Certain individuals or groups try to hinder the work by means of formalism and bureaucracy	1.78	.67	0.7%	12.0%	51.7%	35.7%

Four items (B: $r=.13$ $p<.05$; C: $r=.12$ $p<.05$; D: $r=.19$ $p<.01$; E: $r=.15$ $p<.01$) correlated significantly with the number of employees at the workplace.

The levels of political behavior were also compared with regard to the sets of private and public organizations. Behavior A ($t=2.66$; $df=292$; $p<.01$) and behavior E ($t=-2.21$; $df=292$; $p<.05$) differed significantly, where the mean of behavior A was lower while the mean of behavior E was higher for publicly than for privately owned organizations.

7 Discussion

The result supports the opinion of other researchers (see introduction and theoretical frame of reference) that organizational politics are frequent in today's organizations. It can be seen in the majority of Swedish organizations, according to the sample, and thus needs to be taken into consideration when discussing management issues such as change, development and effectiveness, especially in large organizations. It is interesting to observe that organizational political behavior is reported to occur *to some extent in a large number* of organizations, and *to a large extent in a small number* of organizations. The study could thus be said to report that political behavior exists, but most often at moderate levels.

Informal decision-making (item A, 77%) is the most frequent organizational political action in the Reference Set, with lobbying (item D, 75%) is not far behind. The least preferred actions are passive resistance (item B, 60%) followed by formalism (item E, 64%). While the results of this study provide little information about the contingency factors of these different levels, we can assume that political actions differ in effect and acceptance. It is, perhaps, no great surprise to find conductors of change, such as presidents, vice presidents and HR directors, saying that lobbying is one of the most frequent political behaviors performed within their organizations during change. Lobbying can be used to improve the acceptance of any change initiated by them. Neither is it surprising to find that the most frequent political behavior at their organizations is the decisions themselves being taken informally and privately. Perhaps an empowered conductor of change would not interpret this questionnaire item as an inquiry into political behavior, but merely a question of whether or not decisions are fully democratized. Respondents on the 'shop floors' of the organizations might have given different answers here (Ferris et al., 1989a). We can also picture these managers experiencing passive resistance, and important key persons saying one thing to the manager and then doing something different. But who are the people hindering change by means of formalism and bureaucracy? Maybe they are straightforward advocates and defenders of the organization's delicate, formal system of rules, constituting the organizational memory of its past (Perrow, 1979, March et al., 2000), and thus resisters of change? Or is this a kind of opportunistic resistance, where appropriate rules are used as ammunition to hinder? For practitioners acting as change agents or rule designers, it would be worthwhile to reflect on the effects of rules and their use on change.

The small individual samples prevent a comparison between individual lines of business. However, the comparison between public and private organizations resulted in a difference of two political behaviors; the decisions are, to a larger extent, taken publicly in public organizations, and people tend to use the rules of the formalized organization as a political weapon to resist change initiatives. This result aligns well with the theory that public organizations are more formalized (Mintzberg, 1983). It also indicates that a presumably non-political, fully formalized organization (Perrow, 1979) would also need to be stagnated to avoid political behavior, as the formalization would otherwise serve as resistance to change. Large sets of rules and regulations are connected through a web of interdependencies, making them hard to change. Rules describe how to deal with yesterday's problems, but tell nothing of how to deal with the problems of today and tomorrow (Olin and Wickenberg, 2001).

The results of this study show that organizational politics, to some extent, take place in most organizations. Although this has been argued by other academic writers, will such findings alone be evidential enough to persuade practitioners to overcome their resistance to discussing it (Buchanan and Badham, 1999, Morgan, 1997)? Although many researchers suggest that practitioners adapt their practice to the presence of politics (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992, Gilmore et al., 1996, Kumar and Thibodeaux, 1990, Pinto, 2000, Wilkinson and Witcher, 1993, Robey and Boudreau, 1999),

additionally many textbook authors still avoid this topic. While this study, as well as others, shows that *realpolitik* (March and Olson, 1983) exists in organizations, it is remarkable to note that many textbooks on the subject of organizational change still cling to the *rhetoric of administration*. Hogan and Sinclair (1996) tried to find explanations as to why managers show no interest in the research findings of psychological science. Using Holland's categorizations of career selections (1992), they suggested that managers are not curious enough and researchers not pragmatic enough to create a bridge for utilizing research findings. Is, perhaps, the failure of the textbooks to address the presence of organizational political mechanisms in the social life of the organizations a mere adjustment to the disinterest of the reader/customer of these textbooks? Or is the mentioning of organizational politics avoided for other reasons than disinterest, perhaps because this might stir up defensive reactions (Argyris et al., 1985)? If the latter is true, the next compelling question will be whether or not textbook authors unconsciously avoid taboo topics, or if they consciously comply with the *realpolitik of textbooks*? The results of this study indicate an awareness of organizational politics on the part of managers. It certainly deserves to receive more attention from writers. The textbook content is also important from the competence-development perspective. The fact that organizational politics seems to be widespread calls for managerial education in the subject in order to increase awareness, understand consequences and be able to deal with political behavior. It might be one of the most challenging issues for a modern organization, i.e. educating managers in maneuvering in the grey zone of *realpolitik* in order to increase innovation and effectiveness without creating losers, victims and enemies.

While political actions may take place, on occasion, without change, these are enacted in order to affect an outcome of something, and this something is of course a minor, or major, change. While organizations without change are hard to picture (perhaps some monasteries could fit the bill), there would be little reason to play the game of organizational politics if there were never a change to affect (or deflect). In fact, one may argue that a political action is, in itself, a kind of minor change. Authors advise change agents to play the political game in accordance with the level of change (Buchanan and Badham, 1999). This may be good advice to enable the change agent to be successful, since politicking may be advantageous in carry out a particular change. An explanation of the rather low levels of political behavior during change is, perhaps, to be found in the combination of all changes together; if there is always enough change going on to produce a 'background radiation' of organizational politics, then what is induced by one major, radical change will be lost in a study that is designed like ours. This mechanism may be particularly evident in the higher echelons of organizations, where this study has collected its data. While it still might pay off to play the game of politics, a major change is not, perhaps, such a market of exploitable uncertainty after all. There may be forces regulating the uncertainty, making it less exploitable. The actors managing the arena of change may be paying extra attention to the actions of important actors before and during the change

event, so that foul play does not pay. Our study design measured the behavior of organizational politics during change in general. An alternate study design, whereby the phenomenon is measured in more distinctly defined situations of change, would have made it possible to investigate this better, perhaps. However, the results of this study indicate that political behavior occurs, to some extent, in almost all organizations and that the variation of preferred individual behaviors may extinguish variation in the overall level.

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