

A Review on the Concept of Leadership, Power and Politics

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Abstract

Leadership is concerned with policymaking, directing, supervising and controlling other factors, components or members of the organization or the team, among other important functions. Power is inherent to leadership as it gives rise to, and maintains, hierarchy among the members of the group or organization. Leaders are supposed to exercise the vested power for smooth functioning of the organization. Politics is one misused and misunderstood idea in the organizational context. It is looked at and described as an evil. This paper aims at resolving the misconception about politics and presents it at its truest state by understanding it as stated by the person who coined the term, Aristotle. It will also be analyzed in comparison with leadership to understand the similarities between the two. Upon analysis, it is understood that politics and leadership are the same in their functional nature; it is only their scope of operation that differentiates them.

Keywords: Leadership, Power, Politics, Organization, Politician

Introduction

Leadership is the process of transforming a vision into reality. Leaders take their followers on a journey towards the realization of a common, group goal. Need for leadership emerges when organisms come together and decide to interact for harmonious existence. Leadership is not a matter of one person but can be attributed to a group as well, referred as council or management. However, ultimately it comes down to the vision and ideologies of one person, who is looked upon by all other members of the group, to lead the entire group for betterment.

The ability to think and form an opinion is a beauty of the human brain. Every person has his or her own opinions, likes and dislikes. This is what makes everyone unique. However, if everyone in a group were left to act on their own opinions and ideologies, there would be chaos and disorder in the society; as the likings of one person might not be the likings of another person. To avoid such chaos and disorder, human societies establish social institutions that look after the harmonious functioning between/among the members of the society. Zanden (1990) identifies five basic social institutions common to any society, those are, family, economic, political, religious and educational institutions, respectively. These institutions are established by a common consensus among the members of the group and they all agree to be governed by these institutions. That is the source of the legitimate power in a society; by submission.

The people of the society who share some common beliefs, culture and values govern these institutions. These people, in other words, decide how the society should function; the laws of the state. As mentioned earlier, these institutions have power vested upon them, which means that the person occupying a place (position) in such an institution exercises the powers that are attributed to that position.

Power leads to privileges and therefore has attracted humans throughout their existence. Politics has been seen as a way to achieve power. In this paper, we will look at politics in its pure form as a part of leadership and discuss how leaders use their power for good of the society.

How are Societies Formed?

An individual is the first building block in the formation of a society or civilization. Individuals come together

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to form groups, like family, and groups come together to form what is known as society. There may be many societies over a geographical area based on cultures, religion, race, etc. Such societies come together to form a nation, referred to as country. Society is not something given by nature but rather that which is created by men, in the past, and being made and re-made by men, in the present (Krishna, 2012).

According to Kornblum and Smith (1991), society refers to a population of people (or other social animals) that is organized in a cooperative manner to carry out the major functions of life, including reproduction, sustenance, shelter, defense and disposal of the dead. It is a network of interrelationships among the members of a given population. He adds, 'in the modern world most societies are also (but not always) nation-state.'

It needs to be noted that any kind of gathering is not a society. People may reside over a place for a short period of time, like maybe on a pilgrimage or a camp. This does not become a society. A society is more of a permanent and long-term settlement, where the members plan to reside as long as the factors for existence are favorable. The common beliefs, norms, values and practices is what keeps the members of the society together. For this, it may be well noticed that even if a settlement be destroyed by natural disaster or war, people start a new settlement in another place and find their way back because of these common beliefs and practices.

Society deals with human, the most sophisticated animal on planet earth. To ensure harmonious functioning among the members of the society, the members install certain institutions/offices that look after the smooth functioning of the society. Pradhan (2010) shares Aristotle's views on a ruler. He says that a community of any sort can possess order only if it has a ruling element or authority. These institutions lead the society. They make all major decisions and make laws for the society. This is referred to as constitution.

According to Light and Keller (1975), much of social life and social structure centers around certain basic needs that confront all societies, those being, (i) obtain the goods and services needed for life, (ii) security, (iii) replacing people who die or migrate, (iv) passing on knowledge to the next generation and (v) motivating people to discharge their civil duties. These are the basic activities that give purpose to a societal life. Zanden (1990) identifies five

basic social institutions common to any society, those are, family, economic, political, religious and educational institutions. These are the basic functions that need to be carried out in a society/settlement. The family is the basic unit of any society. It decides the norms on marriage, family life, morality, and dealing with neighbors and other relatives in the community. The economic institution decides how the resources would be circulated in the society among the members of the society, and what would be the common standard of value and measure of value. The political institution is concerned with the decision-making process regarding the operations of the state. This is the most important institution in the society as all other institutions are controlled and affected by the decisions of this institution. Therefore, it can be said that politics is the leadership of the State. Religious institution refers to the common beliefs and values of a society. It needs to be noted that in today's modern world, everyone is free to practice their faith, and that becomes the basis of many communities. The educational institution is concerned with the establishment and maintenance of minimum level of common knowledge that every individual needs to possess in order to live a normal life in the society.

These institutions can't run on their own as they are just ideologies. They need people to translate the idea that these institutions hold. For this, individuals are appointed in these offices to enforce the ideas held by these institutions. By virtue of their appointment, these individuals exercise the power vested upon them by the constitution. This is what gives rise to the need for leadership in any society.

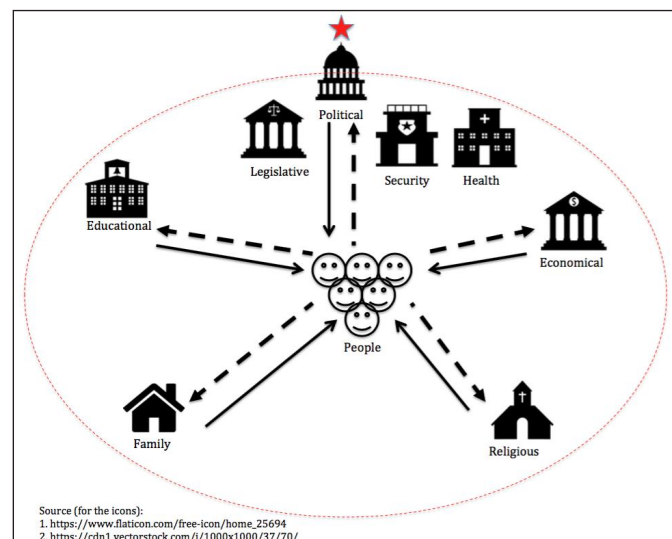


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework of a Society

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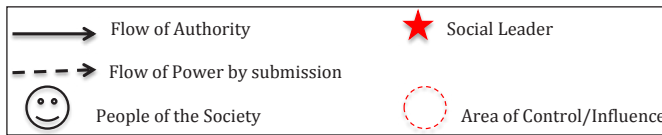


Fig. 1 shows the conceptual framework of a society, which shows that people give power, by submission, to the social institutions and these institutions exercise authority over the people. It also shows that the political institution has influence and looks after all other institutions of the society, and ensures that the autonomous institutions function without any external pressure for the betterment of the people.

What is Politics?

Politics can be described as the process in which a man attempts to govern himself and his social surroundings (Sharma & Sharma, 2013). Aristotle defined man to be a political animal (Sharma & Sharma, 2013). Varma (1975) puts the understanding of politics as per Aristotle, as the science which gave knowledge and understanding to those who controlled the 'polis' and enabled them to co-ordinate all other activities in the society with a view to providing good life for those who comprised it.

David Easton, as cited by Roskin (2019), in his book *The Political System* (1953), conceived the political system as the integrating all activities through which social policy is formulated and executed—that is, the political system is the policy making process¹. This idea was also shared by Aristotle as mentioned by Pradhan (2010), 'The most important task for the politicians is, in the role of lawgiver (nomothetes), to frame the appropriate constitution for the city-state. This involves enduring laws, customs, and institutions for the citizens.'

According to Godwin (2013), politics is an interpersonal situation, which by definition requires at least two people interacting, taking cues from and responding to one another in an ongoing spiral of give and take. He also states that political animals are power-seekers whose success depends on convincing or neutralizing those who are resistant or indifferent.

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-science/Enduring-debates-in-political-science>

The view and understanding of politics have changed after the Second World War. Singhal (n.d.) cites few authors on politics. According to Catlin, 'Political Science is the science of power'. Laswell and Kaplan states, 'Political Science, as an empirical inquiry, is the study of shaping and sharing of power.' According to V. O. Key, 'Politics as power consists fundamentally of relationships of super-ordination and subordination, of dominance and submission, of the governors and the governed. The study of politics is the study of these relationships.'

It needs to be noted here that the view on politics by authors and thinkers has been influenced by the time and the experience they had with the use of power. Politics is not the only source of power as there are other sources and factors that give power to a person or group. However, it may be well said that politics is the social institution that is concerned with the proper use of power in the society.

Finally, politics can be defined as the art of influencing the decision making of the decision makers, by logic/reason/principles/policies, in regards to formulation of policy/guidelines/principles to direct the functioning of an organization/individual/group to meet/achieve the interest or ideology, of an individual or that of a smaller group within the group, while maintaining a positive relation between/among the members of the group in arriving to a common decision, and avoid all possible conflict by installing policies that prevents the conflict between the various interest groups.

Politics is not to trick or cheat someone. It is also not to use power against someone to get him or her to do something. Politics is not waging war against other people. It is not to withhold a privilege from someone or favoritism. It is not to use force to make people agree with one's idea. These are misconceptions about politics.

What is Leadership?

Leadership is to realize the vision. In this paper, we refer to organizational leadership when we talk about leadership. To understand whether leadership includes politics or not, first we will try to understand that it is meant by organization and what are the functions of a leader/manager in an organization.

Business dictionary defines organization as a social unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals. All organizations have a management structure that determines relationships between the different activities and the members, and subdivides and assigns roles, responsibilities, and authority to carry out different tasks².

From the definition, we get the idea that in an organization there are people at different levels who have their assigned tasks and all need to function coordinately for the achievement of the common goal. This is called hierarchy. A hierarchy shows the organizational levels and the authority-accountability relationship throughout the organization, where a position on top has more authority (power) than a position below. For this reason, a hierarchy is like a pyramid and the leader is at the top of the pyramid. It needs to be noted that, a leader does not decide to be on top nor can he or she change this structure, for it is a natural phenomenon for any organization. Just as there is only one brain in a human body, which takes all decisions for the body and controls other body parts, so is the leader for the organization.

Mangers are required to perform diverse activities in leading an organization. In reality, an organization is not merely controlled by one person; the manager, but a body often referred to as Board of Director or the Management. Terry (1953) said, *'Management is a distinct process consisting of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling, performed to determine and accomplish the objectives by the use of people and resources.'* Mangers are said to take *strategic decisions* for the company. Glueck and Jauch (1984) defined strategic decisions are the mean to achieve end. These decisions encompass... major policies needed for the organization...to achieve objectives. Policies are guides to action.

One of the major functions of a leader is to make decision for the group. The leader can make these decisions alone or the management, depending on the situation and cultural perspective of a leader. In this process, the leader has to first come up with a plan for the group and then convince/influence all, or at least majority, to accept the proposed plan to be the best plan for the interest of the group. Once convinced and accepted, the leader now needs to execute

the proposed plan and this is where the leader takes the lead and starts to exercise authority.

As mentioned earlier, people have their own opinions and views. An idea presented by a leader, or anyone, can be welcomed with criticism and rejection. It is in these situations a leader needs to convince the critics, with reason, logic, emotion and understanding, why the idea is in the best interest of the group. The advantage of such criticism is that it helps to analyze an idea from all angles and validate if it's really a good idea. This process of convincing becomes dirty when power and fear are used to convince or implement an idea on/to a social group that may not be for the best interest of the group.

Therefore, it can be well concluded that leadership is concerned with policy formulation, implementation and controlling for the functioning of the group, besides many other functions. It exercises power and influence over the members as organizations have hierarchy.

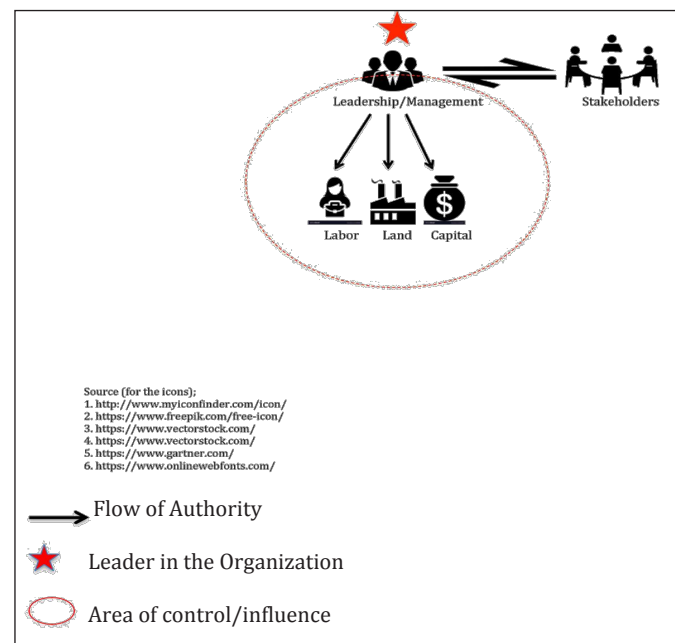


Fig. 2: Conceptual Framework of a Management

Fig. 2 shows how the management has control over the other factors of production and interacts with various stakeholders to facilitate a smooth operation of the organization.

What is Power?

The definition of power depends on the context in which it has been said. Oxford dictionary describes power

² www.businessdictionary.com/organization.html

to be the ability to do something³. According to Weber (1980), as cited by Kessler (2010), *'By power is meant every opportunity/possibility existing within a social relationship, which permits one to carry out one's own will, even against resistance, and regardless of the basis on which the opportunity rests'*. He also cites Dahl (1957), *'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do'*.

According to Massie and Douglas (1975), *'Power and influence...are forces that operate in social interaction. Power is stronger than influence; it is the ability to bring about potential acts by commanding or exerting influence.'*

From these definitions and observations, we can understand that power is to have the required means to do something or get something done. Power simply is a concentration of energy, which can be used to do something. Power brings supremacy to the person having it and able to use it.

Power in itself is not good or bad. Romano Guardini (1998) said the following on power as cited by Kessler (2010), *'In itself, power is neither good nor evil, its quality is determined by him who wields it...Thus power is as much a possibility for good and the positive as it is a threat of destruction and evil. The danger grows with the growth of power, a fact that is brought home to us today with brutal clarity.'*

God, in the Holy Bible, is said to be the source of all power. We know that God is good and HE is powerful. At the same time, we know of the devil, which uses his power to deceive people into wickedness. So, this proves that power is neutral in its truest form. It is only the ability to do something. And even if it is used to do something bad, power doesn't become bad, it remains as the ability to something, only power is in the wrong hands. William Gaddis said, "Power doesn't corrupt people; people corrupt power" (Goodman, 1997).

What are the Sources of Power?

Besides the natural physical power or any other special power at birth, the following are said to be the major sources of power as mentioned by Campbell, Bal, Steed and Meddings (2008) and also Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy (1999):

- Position/Legitimate
- Charisma
- Relationship
- Information
- Expertise
- Punishment
- Reward

An individual has the physical power, charismatic and expert power. Relationship is the basis of power exercised in a family. Legitimate power is the main form of power that is the source of clean power in the society. This will be the focus of our study.

Legitimate power is the power that is legal and acceptable by the society. There are many types of social legislations. These are various forms of government that can be seen throughout the world history as mentioned by Melina (2011) - Absolute Monarchy, Anarchy, Authoritarian, Commonwealth, Communist, Confederacy, Constitutional, Constitutional Democracy, Constitutional Monarchy, Democracy, Democratic Republic, Dictatorship, Ecclesiastical, Emirate, Federal, Federal Republic, Islamic Republic, Maoism, Marxism, Marxism-Leninism, Monarchy, Oligarchy, Parliamentary Democracy, Parliamentary Government, Parliamentary Monarchy, Presidential, Republic, Socialism, Sultanate, Theocracy and Totalitarian⁴.

If the members of a society are not submitting to the governing body of the society on their free will, then that power is not legitimate. It may be dictatorship or tyranny. In such a situation, fear is what rules people. Such powers are usually overthrown in the long run and justice is established. However, even in a legitimate scenario, people experience abuse of power by those in power. This abuse is often misunderstood as politics. People may misuse power while they hold such a position in the hierarchy or decision-making structure, which is abuse of power not politics. The social institutions are vested with power not to exploit the citizen of the state but to protect them. People in position with power need to keep that in mind while exercising power.

³ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/power>

⁴ <https://amp.livescience.com/33027>

Conclusions

To conclude, it can be said that politics, as an art, is an integral part of leadership. Politics, in its truest state, is the process of attaining a leadership position in the society. Power, on the other hand, is a part of politics & leadership and leaders are expected to display ethics and high moral values in exercising their power. Therefore, in the truest sense, politics is social leadership and leadership is a political process. A good leader is a good politician in its truest sense.

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