MORS453-81
Power in Organizations: Sources, Strategies, Skills
SYLLABUS WINTER 2019

Course focus

Power is a basic ingredient of organizational life. Leaders, middle managers, and everyone else use power all the time, to get things done. Personal experience with power in organizations can be exhilarating or painful, or both. Influence can be a force that you feel passively exposed to, or something that you initiate and shape as a leader. Effective leaders and managers are skilled in developing and harnessing power to attain their goals.

MORS 453 develops your ability to diagnose power dynamics, and your practical skills for navigating them. The course is designed, first to hone your ability to analyze, understand, and evaluate the power dynamics of an organization. The second focus of the course is on practical skills, about how you as an individual can turn this knowledge into action. We develop a tool kit of concepts, tactics and strategies for developing and utilizing power effectively and ethically.

Design of the course

MORS 453 is an intermediate to advanced level course. Real world organizations are messy settings and the skills you develop need to reflect that character. Hence, this class may provide fewer cook-book recipes, and may challenge you to work with greater complexity than more introductory courses you find elsewhere. The payback is that you should acquire not just a set of tools but also some skill in using them competently.

Thematically, the course is structured around three blocks that build on each other cumulatively: The first focuses on how individuals can build and deploy different “currencies” of political capital. Think of political capital as a general-purpose resource that you can leverage when it comes to politics. The second block is about understanding political context, how to diagnose and compare the “rules of the game” in organizations, and how to distinguish players from by-standers. Understanding the rules and the players of the game is essential to use power effectively. The final block of sessions turns to politics proper, to social influence tactics and skills for playing the game. This part is all about how you use your political capital in concrete situations.
Teaching approach

The learning goal is to develop your competence in using diagnostic and action tools for complex environments. This objective is reflected in the way the course is taught. The course alternates between simplifying concepts for the sake of clarity, and complexifying applications for the sake of realism. It also alternates between thinking in abstract methods and concepts, applying them to concrete situations, and reflecting on personal experience. Two qualities are especially encouraged:

Concreteness. If action is key for having influence, then the devil is in the details of execution. Thus, general statements are fine and easier to learn, but they may not correlate highly with effective action. I will therefore occasionally push you hard on the specifics of your recommendations; call improvised role plays, and volunteer examples from your personal experience.

Evidence. If the world is complex and we are relative novices in power analysis, then we are easily fooled by our cognitive biases to jump to premature conclusions. Thus, digging into the details of cases, taking the perspective of different players, and getting to know one’s blindspots are critical. Once you are experts, you can see the forest from the trees. As a learner, you want to examine many trees with great care.

The course draws on three reservoirs of knowledge:

- Research from organization studies, sociology, psychology, and political science
- Business cases, videos, exercises, and media accounts
- Your own experiences.

I have selected the core readings to be accessible and practice oriented, but also academically sound. Mini lectures during class will expand and clarify important ideas from the readings. The goal of lectures is to simplify and sum up concepts as far as possible, and to link them back to the bigger picture of the course. The cases offer a context to apply the concepts learned and to broaden your thinking. The selected case studies are thus thematic, but more than a straightforward illustration of one or two basic concepts. I expect you to think them through thoroughly. It is your job to sift through the case to find course concepts, to take the perspective of different protagonists, and to question information presented at face value. Finally, tapping into your personal experience will not only help you make sense of the course and get the most out of it. It will also allow others in the class to benefit from your insights. I will therefore encourage you to share relevant storied from your work life in class, and will occasionally create experience in simulated role-plays.

Course objectives

Through this course,

- You will able to understand and evaluate the bases, sources, and uses of power in organizations, and develop a vocabulary for describing power dynamics.
- You will develop confidence and skills in managing conflict, and in using political strategies in pragmatic ways to get things done in the workplace and other organizations.
- You will reflect on your own experience with power, develop awareness of your strengths and deficits, and learn to leverage your experience for continued learning beyond this class.
- You will increase your ability to think through and apply central concepts of power and influence. These include:

  1) Political capital perspective on power
  2) Diagnostics tools and techniques to identify the “rules of the game”
  3) Interpersonal influence strategies
  4) Agenda management technique
5) Communication and framing
6) Mobilization and coalition building

Readings

Required readings are in the case packet or distributed in class.

Optional Books (Available from www.amazon.com and others)

Pfeffer, Power: Why Some People Have It and Others Don’t, Harper Business, 2010. An accessible book by a distinguished researcher on the pathways to power. Illustrated by examples from successful executives in the public and private sectors, the book also relies on the most recent research on power.

Cialdini, Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion, Harper Collins, 2007, Second Edition. A classic, highly-readable guide to the power of social influence techniques, of broad applicability to both marketing and organization studies. Illustrated with vivid examples and supported by research findings, the author, a prominent social psychologist, provides readers with an understanding of the science that underlies six categories of influence techniques.

Assignments and Grades

There are five elements that compose your grade: class contribution, case analyses, group project, peer evaluation, and individual analysis of career strategies. The ratio of individual to group grades is 65:35.*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class contribution</th>
<th>20%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Martha McCaskey (group)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Erik Peterson (individual)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>GROUP PROJECT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic Power Analysis</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Peer Evaluation Adjustment</td>
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<td>INDIVIDUAL ASSESMENT</td>
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* I will select groups by the third class. The size of the groups will depend on final class enrollment.

Class Contribution

It is difficult to obtain an A in this class without consistent and high-quality contributions. Absence is, of course, not a contribution. I understand your time pressures but regular attendance is a must.
If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the class notes and handouts. I will undertake “supportive cold calling” to encourage balanced involvement, to ensure appropriate preparation and attention, and to raise the quality of class discussions. If you are not prepared for a particular session and do not wish to be “cold called” please email me and the teaching assistant beforehand.

To facilitate my evaluation of class contribution: Please bring your nameplates to all classes.

We have 10 sessions together. Participation grades will be based on quality and quantity of contributions, attendance, and submissions to survey and short discussion questions in forclass.com

You may contribute constructively to class discussions in many different ways: Asking clarifying questions; Explaining and justifying your preferred course of action; Identifying key issues in a case or reading; Building on discussion using (relevant) personal experiences and other supplementary material (e.g., news); Listening to your colleagues and engaging them in constructive dialogue and debate; Advancing critical evaluations of arguments and evidence. Participation that demonstrates lack of preparation, or repetition of points already made without advancing the discussion may be graded negatively.

Case Analyses

All case analyses as well as the group project will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Content:** Did you answer the questions?
- **Theory:** How well do you apply appropriate materials from readings and lectures?
- **Data:** How do you utilize evidence to analyze, to make inferences, and to support arguments?
- **Analysis:** How logical, coherent, and complete is your analysis and assessment?
- **Action plan:** Does your action plan build on your analysis? Is it concrete and practical?
- **Writing:** How clear and organized is your presentation of the material?

**a) Group case analysis**

Group case analyses are required for the Martha McCaskey case. The case questions are listed under the corresponding class session. The write-ups are due through Canvas before the beginning of this class. The page limit for the case analysis is 6 pages double-spaced, 12-inch font, 1-inch margin, plus no more than 2 pages of exhibits. Please apply the course frameworks in answering the case study questions and do not forget to include a plan of action.

**b) Individual Case Analysis**

Individually prepare an analysis for the Erik Peterson (A) and (B) cases. The case questions are listed under the corresponding class session. The write-up is due at the beginning of that class. The page limit is 8 pages double-spaced, 12-inch font, 1-inch margin, plus no more than 3 pages of exhibits. Please apply the course frameworks in answering the questions and do not forget to include a plan of action.

**Group Project – Strategic Power Analysis**

The assignment is to write an analysis of power and influence. Think of yourself as writing a mini-case study, but without the open ending. You can approach this assignment in one of two ways.

- Either, choose an individual on whom to focus. (No Kellogg Professors Please!), Or, choose to focus on a company, a department, a division, or some other organization.
• Select a political challenge the individual or organization is facing, will face, or has faced in the past.
• Gather information directly through interviews and written material about the person or the organizations. Rely on multiple sources to validate your findings.
• Make sure you have sufficient access to information for performing your analysis. Use the course frameworks to analyze the situation, what has transpired, what the individual or organization could have done differently, and provide recommendations for future actions.

In either case, the analysis should encompass: a description of the political context, relevant political actors or interests, their power bases, the strategies and tactics they used (or are using), critical events and issues, and their outcome(s).

A one-page progress report is due February 16. The report should include:
• The title of the project
• A short description of the project content, the focal individual or organization, and the pertinent issues or events
• Project planning: what has been done, what needs to be done
• Assessment: Is the project on track? Any difficulties?

The final written report, due March 9, should include (1) the executive summary; (2) a 3-4 page length description of the key facts of the case; (3) a 7-10 page case analysis, plus no more than 5 pages of exhibits. Reports should be formatted double spaced, 12 inch font, 1 inch margins.

Please submit the executive summary of no more than 250 words electronically. All groups will present their projects to the class on March 16.

**Individual Power Assessment**
Write a self-assessment and personalized development plan using frameworks and concepts from class. This involves the following steps:

a) A statement of your goals and motivation.

b) A critical assessment of your personal power and influence profile: What have been recurrent habits, strengths and weaknesses throughout your previous career? This can be within a single job and company or across contexts. But you want to look for systematic patterns and provide some evidence for your conclusions. As part of your analysis, focus on one or two critical events that you faced in your career, the issue or problems you faced, how the issue or problems were or were not resolved, and how you employed power and influence tactics.

c) An assessment of your development needs in light of your professional goals and the requirements implied by these goals: What changes do you need to make to reach your goals, what sources, skills and strategies do you need to develop or perfect, which contexts to seek and which to avoid? Make sure to clearly identify your goal(s) and the time frame, and explain how this future setting makes for different or similar challenges from the past experience that you analyzed in part a).

d) A concrete tactical plan for how to implement your development strategy: When and how will you learn and practice new skills, when and how to apply them, and how will you build in feedback into the process to stay on track. Habits are hard to change and it is helpful to identify specific situations and realistic short- and medium-term steps. As
part of your tactical plan please carefully consider not only your current position but future career development.

Your grade will be based on the insightfulness of the rationales for the key lessons learned, your skill in applying class concepts, and the logical consistency of your analysis and plan. (7-10 pages, double-spaced, 12-inch font, 1-inch margin, plus no more than 2 pages of exhibits). The individual assessment is due March 16.

Grading policy

I will not hesitate to use the full grading scale, top to bottom, to reflect the quality of your work. You will receive feedback with each assignment, and I will make every effort to keep a quick turnaround time. Late assignments will carry a penalty equivalent to 20% of the grade. If you are unhappy with a grade, you have one week to submit an explanation via email of why you think I should reconsider your grade. If I do not receive a written explanation within a week of you receiving the grade, I will not entertain complaints. If I do receive a written explanation, I will invite you to come to office hours to discuss the assignment and grade in more detail. Final grades for the course are simply the sum of the individual components.

No Laptop or Tablet Policy

You may not use laptops, tablets, mobile phones, or related devices during class.

Kellogg Honor Code and Code of Classroom Etiquette

The 453 course, as all Kellogg courses, is subject to both the Kellogg Honor Code [http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/policies/honor-code.aspx](http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/policies/honor-code.aspx) and the Code of Classroom Etiquette [http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/policies/etiquette.aspx](http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/policies/etiquette.aspx). For the individual written assignments, assistance from other students or any other individuals is not allowed, subject to the Honor Code. You must also provide an individual evaluation of group project participants (forms to be handed out in class), without discussing the evaluation with other students.

Except for case preparation for the Martha McCaskey and Erik Peterson (A) and (B) cases, which involve group or individual written assignments, you are encouraged to discuss, prior to class, case and readings with other current 453 students. For Martha McCaskey you may only discuss the case with those in your own group. The Erik Peterson (A) and (B) cases must be prepared individually without consultation with any other students. Please do not consult cases with any former or prospective 453 students.

Subject to the honor code, you should not consult any additional materials or sources other than those provided in case preparation or in completion of individual or written assignments. In preparation of the final group project, all sources used must be clearly referenced in the paper, and any analysis or conclusions derived from other sources must be clearly identified.
SCHEDULE OF CLASS TOPICS AND REQUIREMENTS

PART I. INTRODUCTION: POLITICAL CAPITAL IN ORGANIZATIONS

Part I gives you a general introduction to the class and to the political capital perspective on power in organizations. I will introduce some key concepts, which we will then apply to the case. I will also provide an overview of the logic behind the design of the class, and will discuss organizational and logistic issues.

Session 1 – January 12
Readings:
• Ocario, “Four Tips to Gain Insight in Your Organization,” Kellogg Insight
• McClelland and Burham, “Power is the Great Motivator,” HBR (CP)

Case: Thomas Green: Power, Office Politics and a Career in Crisis
Preparation:
• What are Green and David’s sources of power? How has Green’s power changed since his promotion to the Senior Market Specialist position?
• What are David’s goals and motivation with respect to Green?
• What could Green have done differently?
• What options are available to Green now? What should he do?

Video Case: Hotel Rwanda (In Class)

PART II. MACROPOLITICS: THE RULES OF THE GAME

Part II focuses on the written and unwritten rules of the game in organizations. While power and politics play out in all organizations, the structure, culture, and norms of the organizations shape what is valued, what opportunities and constraints are available for gaining and deploying political capital, and how the game is played.

Session 2 – January 19
GROUP ASSIGNMENTS HANDED OUT TODAY
Readings:
• Scott-Morgan, “Unwritten Rules of the Game,” pp. 21-27 (CP)
• Gelfand, “Is Your Organization Tight or Loose? How to Tell—and Ways to Fix It,” Fortune
• Goffee and Jones, “What Holds the Modern Company Together?,” HBR (CP)

Case 1: Navigating Organizational Politics: The Case of Kristen Peters (A) (CP)
Preparation:
• What are the rules of the game at the PMW New York office of Taylor Reed?
• What types of political capital appear to be most highly valued at the PMW New York office of Taylor Reed?
• At the end of the summer what are Kristen Peters’ sources of political capital? What are her power deficits, if any?
• Will Kristen Peters receive a full-time job offer from the PMW New York office of Taylor Reed? Why or why not?

Case 2: DILA Capital
Preparation:
• What are the rules of the game in the emerging venture capital ecosystem in Mexico? What is the role of sociability and solidarity in shaping the culture and rules of the game?
• How are the rules of the game in the venture capital ecosystem in Mexico similar to or different from those in the United States? How do they differ from traditional businesses in Mexico?
• What is the value of the varieties of political capital in the venture capital business ecosystem in Mexico? How are these values similar or different in DILA Capital?
• How do the rules of the game in the Mexican venture capital ecosystems affect the likelihood of DILA Capital’s success?
• How successful has Alejandro Diaz Barroso been in navigating the rules of the game? In gaining political capital?
• What recommendations would you give Alejandro for the future?

Fill out the class prep questions on forclass.com. Deadline: 9:00 am

PART III. MICROPOLITICS: SOURCES AND USES OF POWER

Part III focuses on how to develop, leverage, and use political capital in organizations and its effect on both effective career management and leadership in organizations. We will introduce a political process framework that links the deployment of political capital and influence to organizational events.

Session 3 – January 26
GROUP CASE ANALYSIS - DUE TODAY!
Reading:
• Kleiner, “Are you with the In-Crowd,” HBR (CP)

Case 1: *Tim Keller at Katzenbach Partners LLG (A) (CP)*
Preparation:
• What are the rules of the game at KPL and what is valued for advancement?
• What has Keller done right and what wrong to build his reputation at KPL?
• What are his deficits looking forward?
• What should Keller do about the weekend meeting and why?

Fill out the class prep questions on forclass.com. Deadline: 9:00 am

Case 2: *Martha McCaskey (CP)*
Group Case Analysis:
• What are the rules of the game at Seleris Associates and in the Industry Analysis Division?
• What are Martha McCaskey’s sources of political capital? What are her power deficits?
• What exactly is the situation McCaskey is facing? Do you agree with her assessment of the situation? How did this quandary develop for McCaskey?
• Analyze the action alternatives that McCaskey faces. What should she do? In your analysis consider her political capital and the risks she faces.

Session 4 – February 2
Readings:
• Baron and Markman, “Beyond Social Capital” (CP)
• Ibarra and Hunter, “How Leaders Create and Use Networks,” *HBR* (CP)

Case: *Claude Grunitzky* (CP)

Preparation:

- How successful has Claude been as an entrepreneur so far? Why?
- What are Claude’s sources of political capital and how has he leveraged them?
- How did Claude build and maintain his social capital?
- How did he use his social capital?

Exercise: *Organizational Behavior Simulation: Leveraging Networks (HBS Simulation, Spela Trefalt)*

**Fill out the class prep questions in forclass.com. Deadline: 9:00 am**

Session 5 – February 9

**INDIVIDUAL CASE ANALYSIS DUE TODAY!**

Readings:
- Kotter, “Power, Dependency, and Effectiveness”, *HBR* (CP)
- Hill, “Becoming the Boss”, *HBR* (CP)

Case: *Erik Peterson* (A), (B)

Case Analysis:

- What are the rules of the game and culture at CelluComm and at GMCT?
- What were Erik Peterson’s sources of political capital and what are his power deficits? How did his political capital change over time?
- Overall, what were Erik’s critical dependencies and how did he manage them? Which were most important? What could he have done differently?
- From a power and politics perspective what are Erik Peterson’s strengths and weaknesses as the head of GMCT?
- What recommendations would you give Erik Peterson? What should his priorities be? Provide an explicit plan of action.

**PART IV. TACTICS FOR GAINING AND USING POWER**

Part IV focuses on the development and use of political skills with particular attention to agenda management, framing, and communication. We will also discuss the use of political will.

Session 6 – February 16

**ONE PAGE GROUP PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT DUE**

Reading:
- Maister, “Garbage Can Decision Making” (CP)

Case: *Donna Dubinsky* (A) (CP)

Preparation:

- What are the rules of the game at Apple? How have they changed?
- What are Donna’s sources of power? How powerful are they?
- Analyze the conflict over the distribution strategy. Make use of the garbage can model.
- Assess Donna’s handling of the conflict so far. What has she done effectively? What alternative tactics could she have undertaken?
- Will her ultimatum be accepted? Why or why not?
Activity: Agenda Management Simulation: Chicago Olympics 2020 (Handed out in class)

Fill out the class prep questions on forclass.com. **Deadline: 9:00 am**

Session 7 – February 23  
Reading:  
- Simons, Control in an Age of Empowerment, HBR (CP)

Case 1: *Rudi Gassner and the Executive Committee of BMG International* (A)  
Preparation:  
- What is Gassner’s situation as a new leader? What are his initial sources of political capital?  
- How has Gassner developed his organizational capital and his political capital more broadly?  
- What strategies and levers of control does Gassner employ to increase his power?  
- How should Gassner proceed with regard to changing the MD bertriebergebnis? Why?  
- Compare Amir Dan Rubin’s strategies and tactics for power to those used by Gassner.

Case 2: *Amir Dan Rubin: Success from The Beginning*  
“Lean Thinking Leads to Success,” AD. Rubin, *Smart Business*,  
Preparation:  
- What power and influence strategies and tactics did Rubin employ to successfully implement his vision for Stanford Health Care?  
- How does the Stanford Operating System (SOS) shape Stanford Health Care’s strategic and operating agenda?  
- Do the multiple meetings of the SOS enhance its effectiveness? Why or why not and how?  
- Under what conditions can the success of the SOS model be replicated in other organizations?  
- Compare Amir Dan Rubin’s strategies and tactics for power to those used by Gassner.

Fill out the class prep questions on forclass.com. **Deadline: 9:00 am**

Session 8 – March 2  
Readings:  
- Ibarra and Suesse: Building Coalitions (CP)  
- Battilana and Tilesik: Self-Monitoring

Exercise: Fastskins

Session 9 – March 9    
**STRATEGIC POWER ASSESSMENT DUE TODAY!**  
Readings:  
- Pfeffer, “Executive in Chief: The Importance of Framing and Repetition”  
- Tannen, “Power of Talk,” *HBR* (CP)  
Case: *Orit Gadiesh: Pride at Bain & Co.* (CP)
Preparation:
- What are the rules of the game at Bain & Co?
- What are Gadiesh’s sources of political capital? How does she exercise interpersonal influence?
- Identify and evaluate Gadiesh’s career-building strategy.
- What speech should she give? Why?

Fill out the class prep questions in forclass.com. Deadline: 9:00 am

PART V: GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Session 10 – March 16
Group Presentations
INDIVIDUAL POWER ASSESSMENT DUE TODAY!