

## POLITICS IN IT-PROJECTS

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### ABSTRACT

Power and politics are indispensable to any social institution. By the same logic, formal organizations are not the exceptions rather battlegrounds for playing political games to hold and maintain power in the group, organization and community. Given this, if a project is perceived disturbing for the existing power structures, it is resisted by those who find their power threatened. Information in itself is a powerful resource thereby vital to political capacity of those who hold it against those who don't. This paper carves out the political strings in the development, use and maintenance of computer-based information systems (CBIS) in public and private organizations of any size, structure and power with a view to come up with a logically interwoven layout of the problem and solution models.

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### INTRODUCTION

Digital divide is no more a novel phenomenon, which classifies the world according to haves and have-nots or "information rich and information poor (Walsham, 1993)." A nation's global political positioning stands on her capability to harness information technology (IT) for production, use and progress levels. The same political partition is visible down in the organizations both in public and private with varying degrees of issues and impacts depending on differing contexts of the work environment. Given this, the possession and holding of information is a power to uphold the political position of haves and have-nots in every organization because "Power and politics are inevitable in information systems (McGrath, 1997)."

Data are a central "political resource," which "symbolizes status, enhances authority and shapes relationships (Keen, 1981)." Hirschheim (1994) comment that the use of information systems can be seen from many perspectives such as symbolic, political and persuasive in addition to decision making dimension. Political issue is not specific to the development phase only; it continues throughout the life cycle of an IS, piercing through development to use and maintenance. For example, "Research shows that initial successful implementation is not final, political campaigns continue throughout the life of CBIS and these are responsible for maintaining and shifting balance of power (Kling and Iacano, 1984)."

### Organizational Politics

Organization is the structure of human and material resources that is used by the managers. Thus, managers are possessors of these sources thereby powerful to use them in the organizational matters. Any threat to this will naturally be taken seriously otherwise power-sharers will emerge who may take it in toto. A manager's power speaks through the control over resources (Cavaye and Christiansan, 1996), which is less physical and more virtual in the sense that managers command resources through information and its communication. Thus, shifting control of organizational data is virtually the transfer of power. Any such situation triggers, what (Mintzberg, 1991) calls "Politics," which "are mechanisms that are created in pursuit of power." because "The political metaphor views an organization as a loose network of people with divergent interests and who gather together for the sake of expediency (Walsham, 1993)."

### Power Structures

Organization is a mega structure of several sub-structures. Power structure emerges from the distribution of authority over resources. Chain of command shows the degrees of power held by officers in every layer of the hierarchy. This structure creates the bosses, colleagues and subordinates. Positive change in power is acceptable but its reduction cannot be compromised; rather resisted. Dhillon and Backhouse (1995)