

Administrator Perceptions of Political Behavior During Planned Organizational Change

by

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the reason for my being,
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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to better understand community college administrator perceptions of political behavior during planned organizational change. The goals were: 1) To identify political behavior that administrators engaged in to achieve desired organizational outcomes; 2) To examine whether the use of political behavior varied across administrative levels; 3) To investigate whether the types of change initiatives led varied across administrative levels; and 4) To explore whether administrators believed they achieved desired outcomes when leading change. Embedded in this study was the assumption that leaders can achieve desired outcomes in a politicized environment by engaging in behavior that effectively initiates and guides change.

John Kotter's (1995) Eight Steps for Leading Change Model and the political perspective served as the conceptual frameworks for this study. A qualitative case study methodology was used and individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 48

administrators at three Michigan community colleges. Results of administrator perceptions of political behavior were presented in three case studies. Analysis of the data revealed five major findings: 1) Administrators engaged in a myriad of political behavior (e.g., building a compelling case, involving the faculty, sharing information to sell ideas, and discerning others' personal agendas) when leading change; 2) Five core behaviors were typical of all administrators when leading change: getting buy-in, building relationships, involving others, listening and showing respect, and doing homework/research; 3) The kinds of political behavior used varied across administrative levels; 4) Change initiatives varied across administrative levels; and 5) Administrators believed that they achieved desired outcomes when leading change.

Analysis and interpretation of data led to the identification of a concept of “politically perceptive” administrative behavior. Those who were politically perceptive (a) exhibited a high level of awareness of workplace politics, (b) recognized how to manage their relationships with other organizational members in a socio-political environment, and (c) considered timing when taking action. Specific examples illustrating politically perceptive administrative behavior were highlighted and the three spheres (i.e., anticipatory thinking, calculated patience, and role acting) central to being politically perceptive were discussed.