

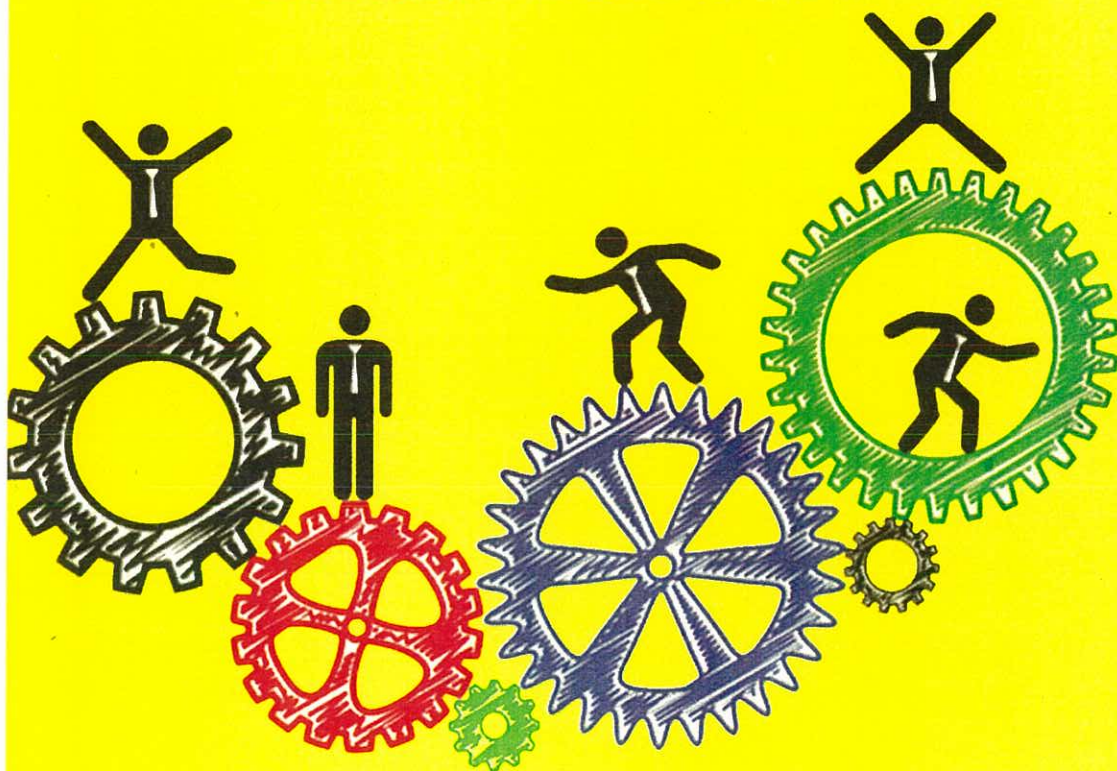
# Kaustubham



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Issue

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&  
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**CHANGE:**  
**WITHIN & WITHOUT**



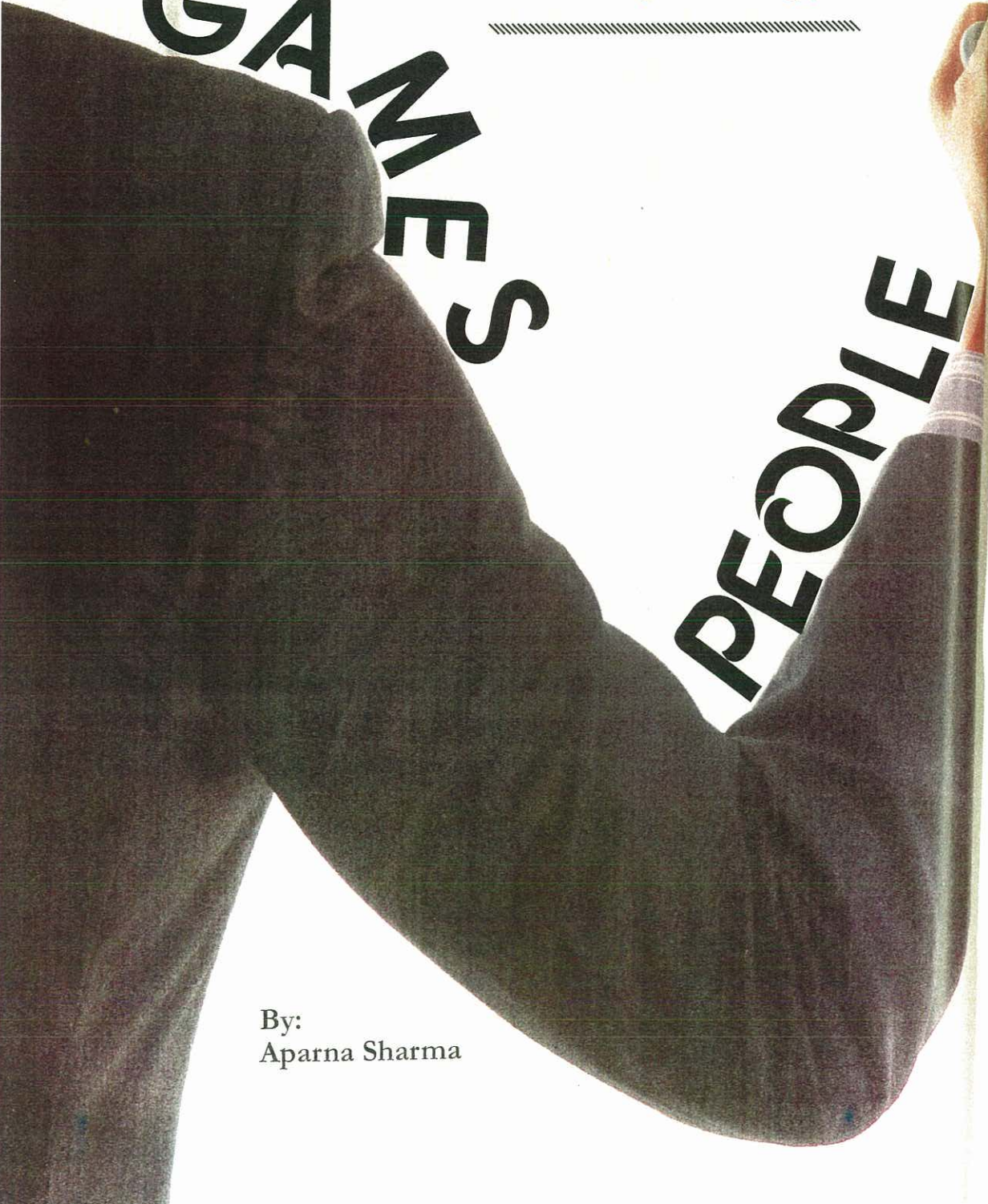
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MUMBAI



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“What words or phrases come to mind, when one thinks of organizational politics?”

Backstabbing, Brown nosing, Bootlicking, Style over substance, Manipulative, Hidden agendas, Old boy networks, Turf struggles, Deals under the table, Power hungry.”  
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# GAMES PEOPLE

By:  
Aparna Sharma



I was recently invited to an old friend's 40th birthday celebrations. Was hoping to party, instead had a stimulating discussion with Maya, a 40 plus Alpha woman (competent, confident & ambitious who always spoke her mind) on being politically savvy in the corporate world. Maya sounded like she was a victim of organizational politics. Since, only the week before, I had attended a half day session by Elizabeth Coffey on the topic "Political Savvy: Strategic Influencing in an Ethical Way", I too was raring to share what I had learnt.

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Maya had excelled during the last 3 years and was the main contributor to the business unit profits. Yet, a large chunk of the year-end bonus went to those who had worked for over ten years and constituted what is called the old boy's network, notwithstanding the CEO's public commitment to gender diversity. She was disillusioned, hurt and quit because she refused to be treated like this, firm in the belief that contribution, demonstrated leadership and integrity should be the only parameters to measure performance.

The reality is that every organization has its share of organizational politics. Just like it takes all kinds of people to make this world, so also an organisation. Since all are not alike, one must learn to understand and deal with the "Foxes" in the Corporate Jungle. Actually, such insights could become a source of competitive advantage vis-a-vis others.

As one climbs the corporate ladder, the ability to successfully navigate the complexities of organizational politics and influence all stakeholders including peers becomes as critical as professional competence.

What are the road blocks to being "Politically Savvy"?

As I heard Maya's story here are my impressions. By nature, Maya was an idealist, a perfectionist, hard working

with high moral values. She was committed to the organization's well-being but invariably ignored the importance of inter-personal dynamics in decision-making. When I witnessed similar behavior in one of our Board Meetings, was impressed but it appeared as if the speaker was the sole custodian of organization's interests.

In short 'you were with or against me', thus discussion gets driven by the virtue of righteousness and emotion. Maya was always so pre-occupied with work that she rarely sat back to reflect on the under-currents and glances exchanged during meetings. In a sense, she was oblivious to the organizational dynamics.

So what distinguishes "Savvy players"?

According to Joel De Luca (Author of the book "Political Savvy"), Savvy players have 5 traits namely-

Puts the organisation first, Keeps career as an outcome versus goal, Plays above board, Legitimizes the task & Practices ethical influence.

They constantly take small risks. Thus, Savvy players are able to make an impact continuously, have higher chances of a successful innovation attempt with significantly higher performance ratings and are more likely to be viewed as leaders.

What strategies are adopted by "Savvy managers"?

Here is what Joel De Luca says. One, when building support for a new idea, set up formal and informal meetings with key decision makers and those who will influence decision to build widespread support. Two, when you have proposed a radical new idea for the business and your boss says he is going to set up a meeting in a few days with his superiors to discuss it, you can seize the opportunity to prepare a super presentation ( be fully prepared) or get the meeting postponed if you are not fully ready. Three, in a meeting to discuss radical or controversial ideas, ensure that atleast 51% of the influence in the room( could be the boss alone) already understand the idea and are willing to explore it further. Four, whilst presenting your idea, always look at the matter comprehensively, i.e., beyond technical merits and emphasise on financial & other benefits to the business. Five, when implementing a strategy to influence others, start with someone you trust, who has the most influence, is a good listener or any person who is a major obstacle. The starting point to the above strategies is having a good working relationship with those who matter and peers, the ability to see things from other's perspective and think



through your moves carefully.

Before starting meetings, one needs to 'Map the Territory'. According to Joel De Luca-5 key questions need to be addressed. 'Who are the key players? What is their power/influence in the organization? How much are they currently for or against the issue? Is that likely to change? Does the individual have strong positive or negative relationships with other key players?

It is very important that the answers to the above questions are mapped before a meeting. Also, try to visualize why is a person for or against the idea and list down possible his/her concerns. Next prepare an FAQ( or may be clear mental notes) before the meeting that has answers to every concern. This is very helpful since it also helps in clarifying your own thoughts.

**Your presentation should incorporate well thought through ( with prior buy-in from most key players) solutions to possible objections from opinion makers. The best thing would be how to create a win-win situation.**

If your research tells you that two people are averse to your idea, it might be useful to seek a personal meeting with one of them with an intent to influence and break the Jodi. If your colleague has a personal equation with an opinion maker, request him/her to meet instead. A savvy person would see this as being practical, an idealist might see it going against his/her values.

A peep into the functional responsibility and background of each influencer would help you to identify why a person thinks in a certain way. for eg. if the Finance Director is likely to retire in two years, he/she might be averse to a project that puts pressure on the company's cash flows in year two. I have particularly benefitted by following this approach, though it requires lot of ground work & thorough preparation prior to the actual meeting. But believe me, its well worth the effort!

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Based on the above analysis, you have to plan your presentation and moves at the meeting.

What are the traits of a "Political Savvy" person? "Machiavellian"(Mach)?

According to Joel De Luca, some of the traits of

Political Savvy	Machiavellian
Influences	Manipulates
Creates winners	Creates losers
Team player	Lone wolf
Respect, value	Boot licking, bribery
Open agendas	Hidden agendas
Choosing shots	Calculates
Direct communication	Gossip, Backbiting
Shares credit	Takes credit
Statesman	Politician

Importantly, my advice to Maya was 'at every step look at yourself as a professional first and then a person. Identify and play to your strengths. Be your natural self, not try to be what you are intrinsically not'.

According to Peter Drucker , no leadership is complete until it is grounded in the political reality of organizational life. However, this is not something that can be taught as a course in a business school. What can be, its only when people encounter real situations. a "Live" organizational set up, do they understand years get a hang of dealing with it by developing acumen.



Aparna Sharma is a TISS (Batch of 1999) is currently Country Resources for Lafarge. read more about her <http://aparnasharma.com>

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