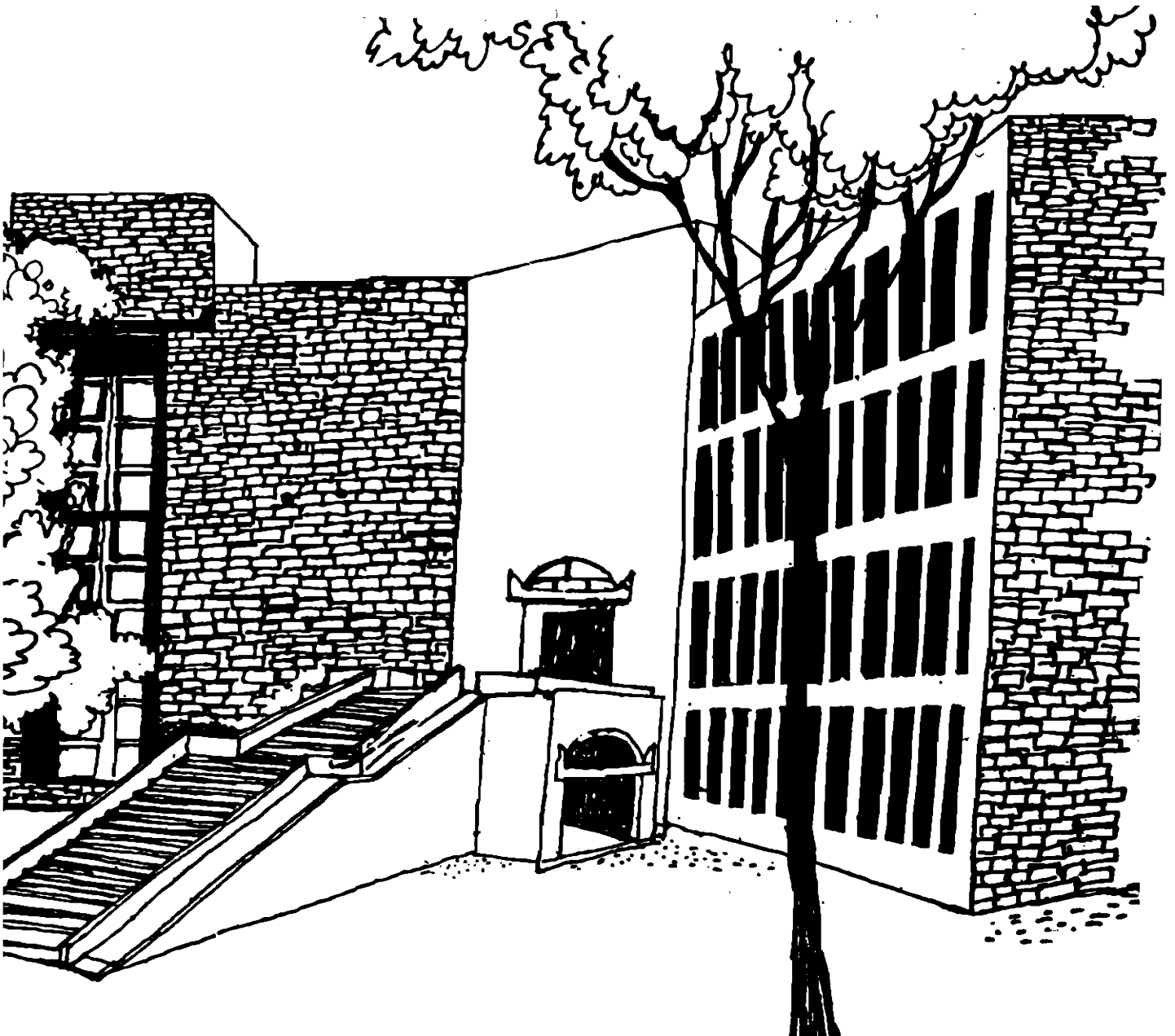




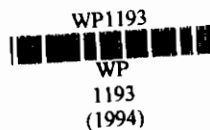
Working Paper



**POLITICAL PROCESSES IN GRIEVANCE
RESOLUTION: MANAGING MEANING OF DUE
PROCESS IN ORGANIZATION**

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the actual process of grievance resolution from a political perspective in one of the largest integrated public sector steel plants in India. Six grievance cases were analysed from a political perspective. It is found that sources of power of the key actors and the influence tactics they use on one-another finally determine whether the case is decided in favour or against the grievant. Resolution of a particular grievance is only an episode in the ongoing political processes in an organization. Moreover, a proper understanding of political behaviour involved in grievance resolution requires analysis at two levels; one, the explicit-apparent behaviour of the actors; and two, the implicit-underlying behaviour, which lies beneath what is apparent and manifests itself as symbols.

POLITICAL PROCESSES IN GRIEVANCE RESOLUTION :
MANAGING MEANING OF DUE PROCESS IN ORGANIZATIONS

From its origins in law, the scope of the concept of "due process" has expanded to include work organizations. The principle of due process seeks to guarantee fair treatment for all by constraining the actions of those with authority to rule. Thus, the right to appeal the actions or decisions of those in authority is a basic element of due process (Edelman, 1990). In the industrial organizations, considerations of due process are being particularly applied in the areas of formalization of the employee-organization relationship and extension of employee rights. Formal grievance procedure (GP) is one of the most significant applications of due process in industrial organizations.

Ever since 1958, when the standing committee of the Indian Labour Conference submitted a draft on the various aspects of a model grievance procedure, formal grievance procedures are being increasingly applied, especially in large industrial organizations in the country.

LITERATURE ON GRIEVANCES IN ORGANIZATIONS

There are only a few empirical studies on grievances and grievance resolution in organizations. This paucity of empirical work on grievances has impeded the development of a theoretical framework on the subject.

A good part of literature on the need for a grievance procedure is normative in nature. Authors stress on why organizations should have a grievance procedure (see Bohlander, 1989; Gordon & Miller, 1984; Lewin, 1983, Lewin & Mitchell, 1992). But there is little work to examine whether the grievance procedure results in all those benefits for various parties and organization as has been claimed in the literature (Cappell and Chauvin, 1991; Clark et.al., 1992; Eaton et.al., 1992; and Gordon and Bowlby, 1988 are some of the exceptions).

Similarly, work on the formal aspects of grievance procedures is often descriptive in nature. Authors either describe the details of a particular formal procedure or conduct a survey of formal procedures (see Balfour, 1984; Begin, 1971; Bohlander, 1989; Miller, 1978). This literature gives us hardly any insight into the actual working of grievance processes in organizations.

There is some literature on the actual process of grievance resolution in organizations. Most of the studies are questionnaire based surveys. A large number of them focus on the determinants of grievance outcomes. They study the characteristics of the grievance (clarity of rights and/or facts, type, stage, use of feedback, etc.), the grievant (skills, pay, work history, sex, etc.) or that of the union representative (following, etc.) (Klaas, 1989; Knight, 1986; Meyer & Cooke, 1988; Ng & Dastmalchian, 1989; Rosen & Jerdee, 1975).

This literature, points towards considerations other than the merit of a grievance for its resolution. A few authors consider the grievance resolution as some kind of a bargaining process (Kuhn, 1961; Lewin, 1983). It appears that grievance resolution is often based on political considerations, that is, grievances are decided on the basis of the power of the individuals involved in grievance resolution, and the interests that they are pursuing.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The present study has two objectives:

1. to study the actual working of a grievance resolution system in an organization, and
- 2.. to study the process of grievance resolution from a political perspective.

Since there is little understanding of the actual working of a grievance resolution system, we have attempted to fill this gap through the present study. Moreover, the existing literature suggests that it is the political considerations which finally determine the outcome of a grievance. Therefore, in this study, we have attempted to explicitly apply the political perspective in order to understand the actual working of a grievance resolution system.

THE POLITICAL MODEL

A commonly held belief in organization theory is that organizations are rational in nature. Through control

devices such as rewards based on job performance or seniority, rules that ensure fair and standardized treatment for all, and properly delineated career paths within the organization, the influence of self-interest on organizational decision-making can be virtually eliminated. Often organization theorists argue that, through mechanisms such as incentives and socialization, individuals in the organization can come to accept the organization's goals.

Political models of organizations, on the contrary, assert that these control devices are not wholly effective in producing a coherent and unified set of goals or definitions of organizations (Pfeffer, 1981a). Rather, political models view organizations as pluralistic and divided into various interests, subunits and subcultures (Baldrige, 1971). "Conflict is seen as normal or at least customary in political organizations" (Pfeffer, 1981a:28).

Thus, for a political model, action in organizations does not presuppose some over-arching intention. Instead, action results, "from games among players who perceive quite different faces of an issue and who differ markedly in the actions they prefer" (Allison, 1971:175). Since the outcome is a result of bargaining and compromise, it seldom perfectly reflects the preferences of any one group or subunit within the organization. Organizational structure is conceptualized at once as a result of power struggle as well as set of conditions or parameters underlying future power struggles (Lawler and Bacharach, 1983).

Political models of choice further presume that when preferences conflict, the power of the various social actors determines the outcome of the decision process. Those interests, subunits or individuals within the organization who possess the greatest power, will receive the most favourable outcomes from the interplay of organizational politics (Pfeffer, 1981a).

Dimensions of a Political Model

In Morgan's (1986) opinion, there are two aspects of power - its sources or determinants; and, the way it is used, i.e., the strategies and tactics employed in mobilizing sources of power and furthering one's interests. The two aspects of power can also be categorized as structural and procedural aspects, respectively (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993; Molm, 1990).

Thus, in order to delineate a political model, we need to work on three aspects of an organizational situation:

1. identify the key actors involved,
2. assess the sources of power of each of the "key actors", and
3. analyse the influence tactics that the key actors use on one-another.

Broadly speaking, we are concerned with structural determinants¹ of power, when we talk about sources of power. The literature on power does not sharply categorise various

sources - some of them are overlapping and some others seem to be too broad (see Bacharach and Lawler, 1980; Morgan, 1986; Pfeffer, 1981a). We have identified seven sources of power from the literature: formal authority, rules and regulations, control of scarce resources, ability to cope with uncertainty, knowledge and information, counter-organizations, and informal organizations. In our opinion, these seven structural determinants of power, formal as well as informal, encompass the gamut of sources of power, identified in the literature (Varman, 1994). Each one of them has been defined in Appendix-A.

Broadly speaking, by influence tactics we mean those methods which an individual uses to affect the behaviour of others, in order to further his/her interests in the organization. For the purpose, the powerholder also uses the resources at his/her command to overcome the resistance of others or induce them to behave in a desired manner. Influence tactics can be used in all the three directions: upward, downward and lateral, and irrespective of whether they are sanctioned by the organization or not (see Allen et.al., 1979; Bhatnagar, 1993; Case et.al., 1988; Falbe & Yukl, 1992; and Kipnis et.al., 1980). Based on both deductive and inductive methods, literature identifies some particular influence tactics, which have been repeatedly used across many studies. We have categorized them into ten different heads: rationality, coalition, ingratiation, bargaining, pressurizing, sanctions, manipulation, invoking higher

authority, legitimating, and evasion (Varman, 1994). Each of them have been defined in Appendix-B.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

Actual working of grievance resolution in organizations had been little researched. Moreover, the research involved the study of process of grievance resolution from a political perspective. When the theoretical framework is not properly formed and the research objective involves the study of a process over a period of time and across a range of complex variables, a qualitative approach towards research is more appropriate (Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Van Maanen, 1982). Therefore, we used case based qualitative method of research for the study.

The unit of analysis for the case is the process of grievance resolution: we have followed a grievance right from its filing to when it is finally resolved, after moving through various stages of the formal grievance procedure. Six such grievance cases were studied at one of the largest integrated steel plants in the public sector in India.² Summary details of the six cases have been given in Appendix-C.

THE ORGANIZATION : BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Integrated Steel Plants (ISP) started production in 1956-57 and has now a capacity to produce 4 million tonnes of steel. It employs more than 57,000 people, including

around 5,000 executives. About 36000 of them work in the plant itself, rest are spread over township, construction and mines. Below we will discuss the industrial relations system and formal grievance procedure of ISP in brief, since they have a direct bearing on our grievance cases.

Industrial Relations System

Industrial Relations (IR) in ISP have been fairly peaceful and the Plant has hardly any history of work stoppages. IR at ISP are governed by the State Industrial Relations Act, 1960. An important feature of this Act is with regard to the recognition of the "representative union". Once a union is recognised, the power it holds in the organization is significantly more than that of the other unions, since a "recognised" union practically becomes the sole bargaining agent for the employees. Only "the union having the largest membership of employees employed in the industry" is recognised.

At present, the representative union is the Steel Workers' Union (SWU), which is affiliated to the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the Trade Union wing of the ruling Congress Party³ in the Centre. In fact the Union is being headed by one of the senior leaders of the ruling party, a former cabinet minister. SWU is the recognised Union right since its inception in 1961 and commands a following of more than 40,000 workers today.

Following are some of the salient features of SWU:

1. SWU has an elaborate organization structure, which is manned through elections held every three years. Hierarchy of positions in the Union is given in Appendix-D.
2. Any member of the Union, who can enlist twenty five members, ie. who can get the annual membership fee from twenty five workers for the Union can become an "active member". Shop level representatives of the Union are chosen through direct elections by Union members. Only active members are eligible to contest for representatives, and the plant is divided into more than 150 wards for the purpose of elections. All the higher office bearers are chosen by the active members and shop representatives. The day to day Union work is delegated to the lowest level of Union functionaries.
3. The whole plant is divided into four zones, each being headed by one of the four Deputy General Secretaries (DGS) of the Union. For all practical purposes, a DGS is the head of the Union in his zone.
4. SWU, at present, wields considerable power in ISP.⁴ For practically all the personnel related day-to-day decision-making, the Union has a say, if not formally, then atleast informally.
5. IR has also been helped by the long and continuing tenure of the top rung of the Union leadership. The

Management also seems to be at ease with the SWU and its present leadership. Therefore, over the years, they have tried to strengthen the hands of the top leadership of the SWU and actively helped them in eliminating any rivals, both inside and outside the Union.

Formal Grievance Procedure

Since 1963, the Plant has a three tier grievance procedure for the employees. A brief outline of the Procedure is given in Figure-1. At every stage, a form has to be filled up by the grievant within stipulated time and the concerned authority has to reply within certain time.

Stage-I grievance is to be replied by the shop level personnel officer (P.O.) and Stage-II by a committee consisting of head of the department concerned (as chairman of the committee), the P.O. and the Union shop representative. Stage-III, the most important stage of the procedure, where substantive matters get resolved, is dealt by a committee consisting of (i) a Deputy General Manager (DGM) level officer as its Chairperson, (ii) P.O., (iii) Manager (Personnel), (iv) Deputy General Secretary (DGS) of the Union and, (v) Grievance Secretary, who is incharge of grievance cell, which is constituted to deal with Stage-III grievances.

Grievance committee, which deals with the Stage-III grievances, is fairly high powered and evenly matched by the

Formal Grievance Procedure

STAGE		PERIOD (DAYS)	
		FORM	DECISION
I	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">G</div> <div style="text-align: center;">↓</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">P.O.</div> </div>	30	10
II	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">H.O.D.</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">P.O.</div> <div style="text-align: center;">↓</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">U.R.</div> </div>	30	20
III*	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">D.G.M.</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">G.S.</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">P.O.</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Mgr. (P)</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">D.G.S.</div> </div>	30	
APPEAL	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">M.D.</div> </div>		

* Promotion/termination cases directly to Stage-III
(6 months)

G. - Grievant; P.O. - Personnel Officer;
G.S. - Grievance Secretary; H.O.D. - Head of the Department;
U.R. - Union Representative; D.G.M. - Dy. Gen. Manager;
D.G.S. - Dy. Gen. Secy., Union.

Figure - 1

two sides, Management and Union. The main representative of the Management is the DGM and that of the Union is DGS, both fairly senior functionaries. More substantive matters like promotion and termination can be directly filed at Stage-III.

SELECTION OF GRIEVANCES FOR THE STUDY

After going through the files of around five hundred cases filed in Grievance Cell from 1990 to 1993, six grievances were selected for the purpose of the detailed study.

The most important consideration for selecting cases was that they should be substantive enough to reflect the complexities of the grievance resolution process. A good test of a system of due process is when the cases are complicated. Trivial grievances such as those involving some clerical mistake regarding leave would not test the system, since they would be settled quickly at an early stage of the formal system. Therefore, it was decided that only those grievances will be considered for the study which came to the Stage-III, the final stage of the procedure. Grievances resolved in the first two stages generally involve relatively trivial matters. The other considerations for selecting involved cases were as follows:

- (a) Apparently similar grievances, where the final outcome of grievance resolution has gone in favour of the grievant/s in one case and against in another.

- (b) A case which involves back and forth communication between various actors and takes a long time to be resolved.
- (c) A case which follows a tortuous course in the sense that the decision may get reversed as the grievance travels through various stages.
- (d) A case which has problems in implementing the decision of the grievance handling body.
- (e) A case in which note of dissent is filed by the union representative against the final decision of the grievance system.

While selecting the six cases, care was taken to capture different types of grievances in terms of issues involved, different considerations as discussed above, different departments, and the background of the grievants in terms of age, work experience, grades, etc. Out of the six cases selected for our study, three cases involved a pair of similar grievances having different outcomes. These pairs of grievances were analysed simultaneously.

DATA COLLECTION

The first step was to go through the documents pertaining to the grievance cases in the Grievance Cell and in the concerned personnel departments. After going through the documents, a list of questions as well as individuals from whom answers to those questions can be obtained was prepared. In-depth and open-ended interviews of those

individuals followed. This was the main technique for data collection. For each case, we attempted to interview all the persons involved in grievance resolution at the three stages. Besides, we interviewed some other persons, like colleagues of the grievant, union personnel, etc., who might have had some influence on the conduct of the cases. Interviews were also conducted to obtain background information on formal grievance procedure, industrial relations systems and personnel policies. Sometimes, additional interviews were conducted to cross check different versions of the actual happenings and to fill-up the gaps in the emerging case reports.

DATA ANALYSIS

Each of the grievances was studied closely - beginning with its filing, to movement through different stages, to its final resolution. We built up the actual process of grievance resolution in the background of the formal grievance resolution procedure, personnel policies, and industrial relations of the organization. After developing a case report of a grievance, we analysed it from a political perspective. In order to make sense of the grievance outcome, for each grievance, we identified the key actors, their sources of power (handicaps)⁵ and influence tactics used by them. A brief introduction to one of the cases, "the Union Representative's Case" and its analysis is provided in Appendix-E for sample.

DISCUSSION : ACROSS CASE ANALYSIS

Through an analysis of grievance cases from a political perspective and then performing a comparative analysis across cases, we attempted to find if there is a relationship amongst the key actors, their sources of power, the influence tactics they use and the final outcome of grievance resolution process.

For the purpose, we categorized grievance outcomes into two: grievances which were decided in favour of the grievants, and grievances which finally went against them. We have called them "favourable" and "unfavourable" outcomes, respectively to distinguish between the two types, although, from the point of view of other actors, they might not be favourable and unfavourable in that order. The key question which follows is, whether the sources of power of the key actors and the influence tactics they use on one-another, differ in the two cases of "favourable" and "unfavourable" outcomes.

To answer the above question, we went through the following procedure:

1. Identified the key actors across the cases. We could identify four key actors, who were common across almost all cases: Grievant(s); Personnel Officer (P.O.), or, in one case, the Grievance Secretary (G.S.) - the two are similarly ranked personnel managers, having similar sources of power, therefore, we have put them together;

the Deputy General Secretary (DGS) of the Union as a key Union Representative; and the Chairperson of the Grievance Committee as the key representative of the Management in the Committee. At Stage-I and II, P.O. acts as a representative of the Management.

2. Next we attempted to generalize the sources of power/handicaps and influence tactics of the key actors. We had earlier identified seven structural sources of power and ten influence tactics from the literature, as listed in Appendix A & B respectively. Taking this list as an aid, we tried to generalize the sources of power/handicaps and influence tactics of various actors across the six cases.
3. After putting sources of power/handicaps and influence tactics in generalized categories, we attempted to find how frequently each category was observed in "favourable" and "unfavourable" outcomes.
4. From the two frequency tables, we have abstracted generalized models for "unfavourable" and "favourable" outcomes as illustrated in Figure 2 and 3 respectively.

Constellation of Key Actors, Sources of Power/Handicaps, Influence Tactics and Grievance Outcomes

We picked up comparatively more frequently used categories of sources of power/handicaps and influence tactics in order to abstract a generalized and parsimonious political model of grievance resolution process. The purpose was to filter

FIGURE 2 Sources of Power/Handicaps and Influence Tactics of Key Actors for "Unfavourable" Outcomes

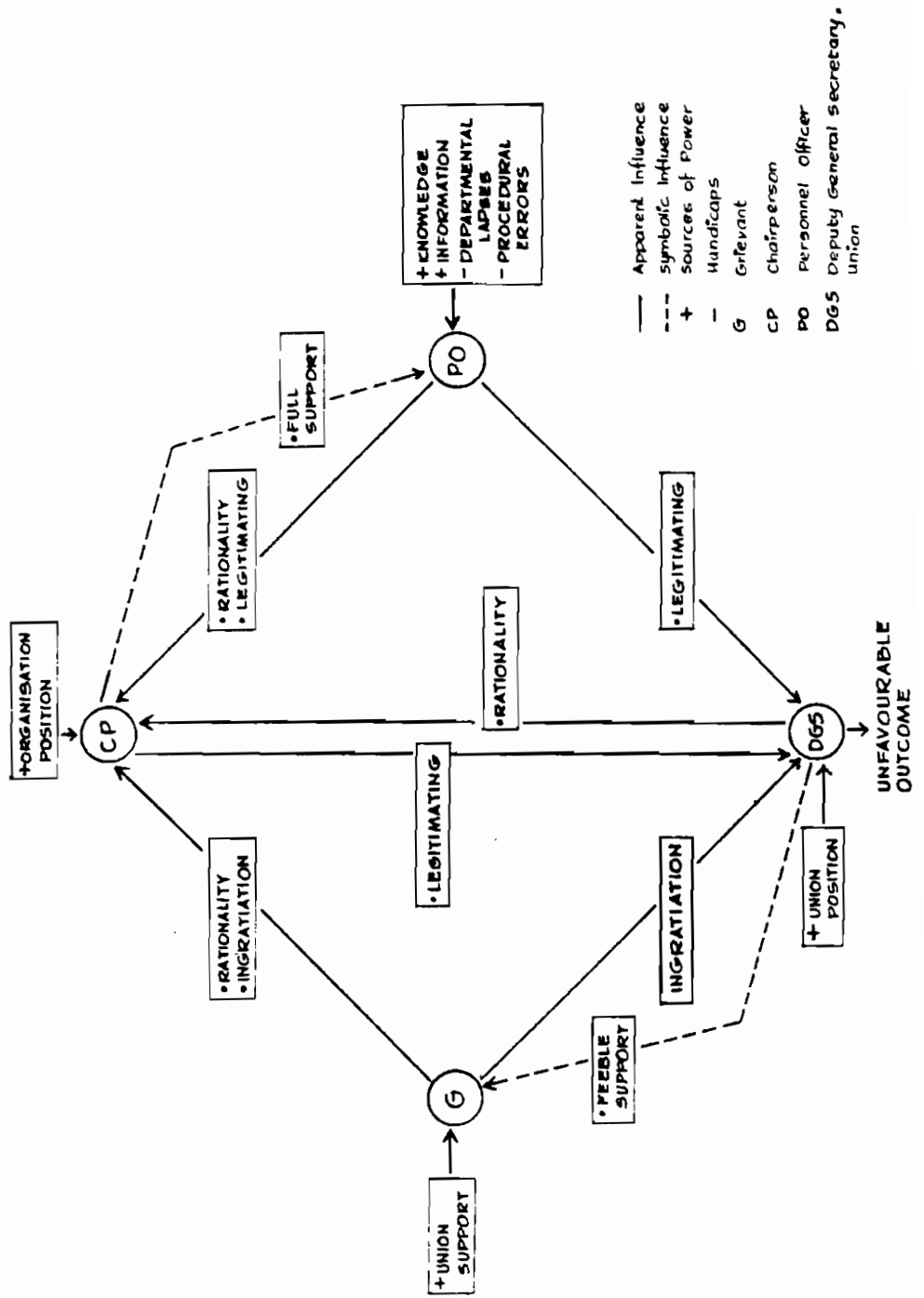
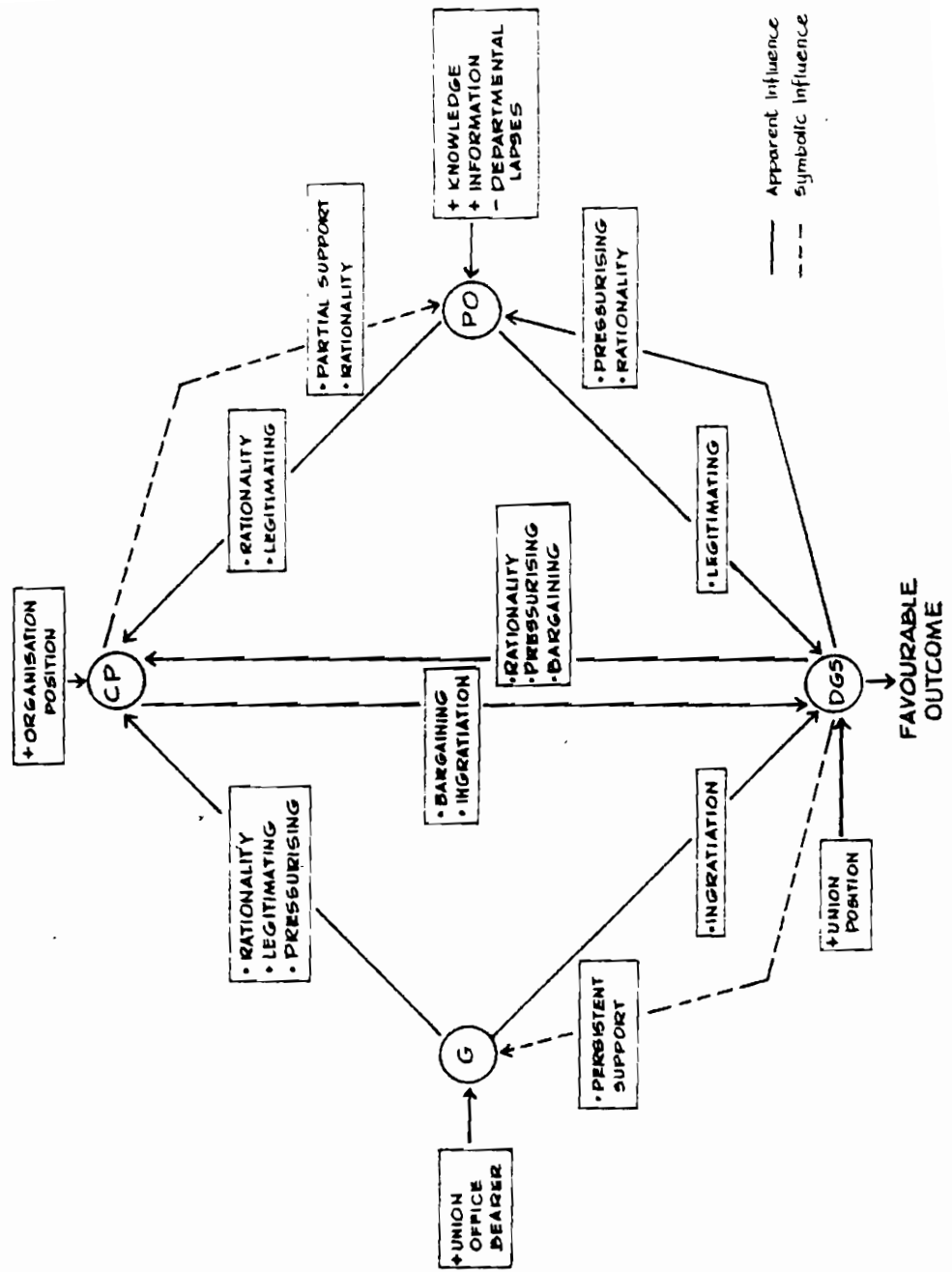


FIGURE 3 : Sources of Power/Handicaps and Influence Tactics of Key Actors for "Favourable" Outcomes



those categories which were less stable, may be because they were specific to the case - issue or the individual actors involved. Porter et.al. (1981) have commented that some individuals are more likely to indulge in political behaviour than others. But, to the extent our cases involved different set of actors in different cases, we have been able to filter out the individual variances in our generalized pattern.

Unfavourable Outcomes

The generalized combination of key actors, sources of power/handicaps and influence tactics for "unfavourable" outcomes has been shown in Figure 2.

Grievant's main source of power is Union support at early stages, i.e., from Union shop level representative. He attempts to influence the DGS of the Union through ingratiation, i.e., he attempts to get friendly with the DGS to pursue his grievance. To influence the Chairperson of the Grievance Committee, he uses a combination of rationality and ingratiation. He tries to reason out his case and also makes a request to the Chairperson. We have excluded the interactions between Grievant and Personnel officer, because they take place at the early stages of the grievance procedure. In our model, we have captured the reality at Stage-III, which is the most significant stage of the grievance procedure.

Personnel Officer (P.O.) derives his power from the knowledge and information that he has regarding rules, procedures, records, precedence, etc. But his case is weakened by either some lapse by his department (which might be the basis of the grievance), or some error in following the grievance procedure during earlier stages (for instance, in one of the cases, the grievant was promoted erroneously while he did not have the requisite academic qualifications). Given the P.O.'s sources of power, he often cites rules, precedence, etc. to legitimise his case, both with the DGS and the Chairperson. Besides legitimating, with the Chairperson, the P.O. also gives some logical argument to support his position, often to cover his department's earlier lapses.

The DGS and the Chairperson derive power from their respective positions in the Union and the Management. The DGS tries to reason out the case with the Chairperson, while the Chairperson rejects the grievance on the grounds of rules.

In this section we have discussed only those influence tactics which are at an apparent level, and are shown by bold lines in the diagram. The influence tactics of DGS towards the Grievant and the Chairperson towards the Personnel Officer, which we have termed as symbolic (shown by dotted lines in the diagram), will be discussed subsequently.

Favourable Outcomes.

The process for favourable outcomes is illustrated in Figure 3.

The grievant is powerful, because he is either an "active member" or a shop level representative of the Union. Therefore, he himself often has access to the DGS, and does not need the early support of shop representative, as was the case in "unfavourable" outcomes. With the DGS, the grievant uses the same tactic of ingratiation. But with the Chairperson, the grievant uses legitimating and pressurising tactics instead of ingratiation, besides rationality (which was also used for unfavourable outcomes) to support his case. Being a Union office bearer, the grievant uses rules and regulations to support his case and demands his due instead of making a request to the Chairperson.

For the P.O., the sources of power/handicaps are the same as in the case of "unfavourable" outcomes; the only difference being that in favourable outcomes, P.O.'s case is not further weakened by the procedural errors. This only shows that procedural errors are not of much consequence, because, inspite of them, the P.O. gains over the Grievant in the "unfavourable" case. The tactics used by the F.O. are the same as in the case of "unfavourable" outcomes. While for "unfavourable" outcomes, no common tactic emerged which the DGS uses with the P.O., in case of "favourable" outcomes, the DGS uses a combination of rationality and pressurising

to influence the P.O. It may be that the DGS is not so keen to influence the P.O. for "unfavourable" cases. But in "favourable" cases, he attempts to counter P.O.'s position, both with logical arguments and through pressure tactics.

In case of "favourable" outcomes, the DGS attempts to influence the Chairperson through "hard" political tactics. Besides rationality, the DGS uses bargaining and pressurising tactics to influence the Chairperson. The Chairperson finally seems to be yielding to the pressure to be in the DGS's good books by granting a favourable decision to the grievant, although he might obtain some concession from the DGS in the bargain.

In sum, what seems to be tilting the balance in grievant's favour is his power, because of his formal position in the Union. For the other three actors, their sources of power remain the same, both in "unfavourable" as well as "favourable" outcomes.

Grievance Resolution Process: Long Term Perspective

So far we have looked at the grievance resolution process as a self contained entity, with grievance filing as a starting point and the final-outcome as the end of the process. But, grievance resolution can also be analysed as an episode in the on-going political processes in the organization.

In the previous section, we have discussed that the DGS, who uses "rationality" to influence the Chairperson in an "unfavourable" outcome, switches over to "hard" political

tactics of "pressurising" and "bargaining" in case of "favourable" outcomes. In response, while the Chairperson uses legitimating tactics in the first case, he adopts "bargaining" and "ingratiating" tactics in case of "favourable" outcomes. Thus, in the earlier case the Chairperson is able to score over the DGS, while in the latter case, the DGS is able to push through his point. And the nature of influence tactics differ in the two cases.

Although the DGS seems to be winning his point in one case and the Chairperson in another, we need to remember that the two are tied into a long-term relationship, not only as key members of the standing Grievance Committee, where they meet every month; but also as very senior and important members of Union and Management hierarchy, respectively. A particular grievance case is just an incident in their relationship. And therefore, bargaining between the two is not just limited to a particular case. Sometimes, it is between grievance cases - e.g., Teacher's case, where the Chairperson decided the grievance favourably, because several other cases had gone against grievants in the particular Grievance Committee meeting; at other times it goes beyond the particular meeting - e.g., PRS's⁶ Promotion case and DS's Acting Compensation case were decided as "special" cases, so that they did not become precedence for future cases. There has even been an instance of bargaining which went beyond the boundaries of grievances. The DGS withdrew a Union demand, which had nothing to do with

grievance systems in bargain for a favourable decision on PRS's promotion grievance.

A particular grievance is only one of the many issues on which the DGS and the Chairperson take their respective stands, according to how best it fits with their plans to promote their own interests in the Union and Management constituencies, respectively. A specific grievance, by itself, is a relatively minor issue in the portfolio of responsibilities of such senior functionaries, as DGS and Chairperson. It is the symbolic meaning that both the Union and Management attach to the grievances, which invests the grievance procedure with sufficient importance, so as to compel the DGS as well as the Chairperson to take a stand. In the following section, we will discuss the symbolic aspects involved in grievance processes in this organization.

Exploring Deeper Structures of Power : Grievance Procedure as a Symbolic Act

So far we have analyzed the political behaviour involved in grievance resolution from what is apparent - the overt political behaviour. This view on understanding power and political behaviour in organizations upholds that power can be assessed objectively through positivistic method (Das, 1988). Identities of those involved are taken as given, and it is assumed that the parties recognise the conflict of interests consciously. This falls under the traditional

structural-functional paradigm in social sciences (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Of late, studies on organizational politics have been challenging the structural-functional paradigm (Bradshaw-Camball, 1989; Bradshaw-Camball & Murray, 1991; Clegg, 1989; Das, 1988; Townley, 1993). It is pointed out that structural-functional approach to understand power in organizations is too simplistic, and through the tools available in this paradigm, one can only "scratch the surface" of what is "power in organizations" (Bradshaw-Camball & Murray, 1991). For exploring deeply embedded structure of power, it has been suggested that one needs to explore not only what is included, but also what is excluded from the power play (Bacharach & Baratz, 1962). In this view, we need to understand both the overt-apparent as well as the covert-underlying behaviour involved in organizational politics (Lukes, 1974). We need to enquire as to how a status-quo is maintained in a system, how the power of the "elite" is institutionalized and produced and maintained over a period of time (Townley, 1993).

For this purpose, we need to understand the management of meaning and symbols in organizations - the subjective and manipulative aspects of power. To summarize in the words of Pfeffer:

One critical focus of political activity in organizations is the creation of meaning - meaning which justifies the positions of power of some participants, which justifies and rationalises decisions and actions, and which discredits the motivation or information of opponents (1981b:228).

The DGS and the Chairperson get nothing immediately from the Grievant and the P.O., respectively in return for their support. We can make better sense of the DGS and the Chairperson's supporting behaviour, if we again analyze a grievance resolution case as an episode in the ongoing political processes in the organization. Support of the DGS and the Chairperson to the Grievant and the P.O., respectively, is to be seen not only at an apparent level, but also at a symbolic level. By supporting the Grievant, the DGS is attempting to send certain message across to his whole constituency and not just one individual. The DGS would like to be known among his Union members as one who takes up their grievances vigorously with the Management. Similarly, the Chairperson would like to be known amongst his constituency of fellow managers as one who stands by the rules and his juniors, and does not give in to the pressure tactics of the Union.

Thus a grievance resolution episode can also be seen as an act for the larger audience in the organization and not just involving a few actors.

When we attempt to go beyond the surface-level apparent behaviour of the political actors, we realise that grievance resolution does not merely involve inclusion of a larger audience. It also involves excluding certain others from the purview of grievances through deliberate actions of the DGS and the Chairperson. We have some evidence in our cases to support this argument.

One special category of rational argument given by the P.O. was, what he called "repercussions". In some of the cases, the P.O. pointed out that, if the case was decided in favour of the Grievant, it would set a new precedent, and would lead to many similar grievances. In response to this, the DGS and the Chairperson sometimes categorized a particular case as a "special-case". When a grievance decision is recorded as a "special-case" in the minutes, it means that the DGS promises not to use it as a precedent in future cases. It is an informal commitment made by the DGS in exchange of a favourable decision for a grievant, in whom he is particularly interested. Thus, through the provision of "special case", prospective grievants on similar issues are excluded from using the particular case as a precedent.

However, setting aside certain cases as "special" is a violation of the fundamentals of "due process". The fundamental purpose of institutionalizing due process in organizations is justice and fairness. And due process is institutionalized both through framing a formal procedure, as well as through setting precedents, known as "case-law" in a judicial system. The provision of "special case" hits at the very root of due process and prevents other potential grievants from getting an equal treatment, yet both the DGS and the Chairperson accept it in selected cases.

Thus, we have to interpret the relationship between the DGS and the Chairperson, not only as involving conflict but also

collaboration - collaboration to pursue their respective interests, which have a degree of convergence. The interest of the senior functionaries of Union and Management converge to the extent that they want to maintain the legitimacy of the grievance procedure. On the one hand, grievance procedure is one more forum where the Union and the Management indulge in bargaining their respective positions. On the other hand, the two parties work together to maintain the apparent integrity of the formal procedure. It is in the interest of both the parties that employees retain their confidence in the grievance procedure; both the Management and the Union can use the procedure as a leverage only to the extent that employees file grievances regularly.

This does not mean that the grievance procedure is a mere facade, a predetermined play being enacted by the Union and the Management. Instead, our analysis suggests that, at times, the two parties are in broad agreement to maintain the integrity of the procedure, in order to legitimise their actions - the act of the powerful to maintain a political equilibrium in the organization, which best serves their long-term interests. The case-to-case bargaining between Union and Management is within this larger framework of mutual understanding between the two parties.

Thus, at one level, formal procedure of grievance resolution is institutionalized and emphasized as corner-stone of industrial relations in the organization, both by the Management and the Union. At another level, the actual

process of grievance resolution is sometimes decoupled, or at best only loosely coupled, with the formal procedure (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Goffman (1959) calls this as decoupling of "front" and "back" of the stage - an organization stages one kind of act for the audience, which is very different from the actual reality behind the stage. Of late, authors have emphasized the "symbolic" and "impression management" aspects of matters relating to organizational justice and employee rights (Edelman, 1992; Greenberg, 1990).

Observers of Indian industrial relations have commented on the "nexus" between Union leadership and Management (Ramaswamy, 1988; Sheth, 1993). They have also found a growing apathy amongst employees towards Union affairs. This trend, when compounded with the wide latitude in interpreting rules and regulations in a large organization such as studied here, provides enough "perceptual space" for forming "images" of the grievance procedure - images which can widely differ from the actual reality (Alvesson, 1990).

CONCLUSION

In this study we have analysed the actual working of a grievance resolution process in an organization from a political perspective. We have studied six cases of grievance resolution in one organization. For each case, we have identified the key actors, determined their sources of power and handicaps, and analysed their influence tactics

against one-another. In order to make sense of the final outcome of grievance resolution.

We have found that the power of the individuals involved and their political behaviour affects the final outcome of the grievance resolution. Specifically, sources of power (and handicaps) that the key actors have; and the influence tactics that they use vis-a-vis one-another, finally determines whether a case is decided in favour of or against the Grievant. Moreover, this politics has to be seen only as a part of larger political processes in the organization. Resolution of a particular grievance is only an episode in the ongoing political processes.

Therefore, it is important to recognise that political considerations, as opposed to considerations of "merit" of the case, have an influence on due process like grievance resolution in organizations. The very idea of an institution of grievance procedure is to provide the employees with some safeguard against the arbitrary use of power by the superiors and management. But, our findings suggest that one cannot ignore the reality of power and its unequal distribution amongst employees and other actors involved in grievance resolution. The point we are trying to make is that, how best the realities of power can be taken into account while designing due processes in the organization, rather than ignoring them and finding that, finally, political processes have taken over the due processes.

We have also found that the analysis of political behaviour involved in grievance resolution is required at two levels: the explicit-overt level, which consists of the apparent behaviour of the actors; and the implicit level, which includes the intents, calculation of self-interest and the non-apparent behaviour of the actors, which lies beneath what is apparent and manifests itself as symbols.

This implies that a prospective designer of a due-process mechanism needs to not only account for the realities of power, but also recognise the levels of power. The challenge is to move the political behaviour from implicit to the explicit plane, so that it can be recognised readily and accounted for, by the actors concerned.

One important contribution of the study is in terms of the methodology employed for research. Case reports for resolution process of six grievances were reconstructed. Organizations are generally wary of parting with grievance related data, especially once it comes to the specific cases. For this reason, the study focussed on only one organization. This limits the generalizability of our findings. However, we have drawn from the available theoretical framework on grievances and power in organizations to interpret our data. By doing so, we have attempted to lift our findings out of their immediate context and embedded them within the relevant theoretical frameworks.

Our findings are based on six case studies which are build up primarily on unstructured interviews with the actors involved. But the data involving grievances is sensitive in nature. It often involves negative comments by an individual about other actors. The data is often in the realm of perceptions of the individual, and, to that extent, is "biased". Although we have made efforts to cross check an individual's assertions with the other actors concerned, still our case reports are more in the realm of "thick" descriptions - a broad understanding of the process and actions of the individual, rather than a description in fine details. Nevertheless, to the extent that there is a general pattern emerging out of the six cases, we can have a fair degree of confidence about findings.

In many aspects of industrial relations, theoretical frameworks are in the early stages of development. What is needed at this stage is theoretical break-throughs. One such way to bring fresh theoretical insights can be multi-paradigm analysis of the phenomenon. Another method can be process based qualitative study to have a better understanding of the reality-application of inductive logic so that fresh theory can emerge. Our analysis of the process of grievance resolution from a political perspective signifies the utility of such a methodology.

Appendix-A

Sources of Power

Formal Authority

Organizational positions are usually defined in terms of rights and obligations, which create a field of influence within which one can legitimately operate with the formal support of those with whom one works.

Rules and Regulations

Rules and regulations are often created, invoked, and used in either a proactive or retrospective fashion as part of a power play.

Control of Scarce Resource

Those subunits or individuals within the organization that can provide the most critical and difficult to obtain resources, come to have power in the organization.

Ability to Cope with Uncertainty

A player's power ultimately depends on the control he has over a source of uncertainty that affects the pursuit of the organization's aims, and on the importance of this source as compared with other relevant sources.

Knowledge and Information

Knowledge and information can help a person systematically influence the definition of organizational situations and create patterns of dependency.

Counter-Organizations

Whenever a group of people manages to build a concentration of power in relatively few hands, it is not uncommon for opposing forces to coordinate their actions to create a rival power block. For instance, unions develop as a check on management in industries.

Informal Organization

Friends in high places, sponsors, mentors, coalitions or people to trade support and favours to further their individual ends, and informal networks - all provide a source of power to those involved.

Appendix-B
Influence Tactics

Rationality

This tactic involves using rational argument and factual evidence to influence others.

Legitimizing

This means establishing the legitimacy of a request by claiming the authority, expertise or information to make it or by verifying that it is consistent with organizational policies, rules, or traditions.

Invoking Higher Authority

This is to obtain informal support and formal help from the higher authorities.

Coalition

With coalition tactics, an agent enlists the aid or endorsement of other people to do what the agent wants.

Ingratiation

By ingratiation, an agent seeks to get a target in a good mood or to think favourably of him or her.

Evasion

This includes tactic of avoiding the target/issue or scapegoating.

Sanction

This involves using punishment to force the target to do what the agent wants.

Bargaining

Involves give and take or meeting half way between the two parties.

Manipulation

This involves some distortion of information.

Pressurizing

An agent asserts himself, demands, threatens or sends persistent reminders to influence a target.

Appendix-C

Summary of Cases

Case No.	Outcome	Subject	Details of Grievants			I + II filed	Duration (months)	Special case	Imple- mentation	N E D filed	Result
			Name	Grade	Deptt.						
I	F	Termination	MGA + BSR *	L-5 L-4	Plant (SMS II)	N	1	N	Y	N	-
IIa	UF	Promotion	KS	L-8	Plant (OP II)	N	12	N	-	N	-
IIb	F	Promotion	PRS	L-5	Plant (OP II)	N	6	Y	Y	N	-
III	UF	Reinstatement	PB	L-3	Plant (RT & RS)	Y	6	N	-	Y	Rejected
IV	F	Promotion	PCG	L-8	N.P. (Edn)	Y	84	N	N	N	-
Va	F	Seniority	MVR	L-6	Plant (DHP)	Y	26	N	Y	N	-
Vb	UF	Seniority	PRS	L-4	Plant (DHP)	N	10	N	-	N	-
VIa	F	Acting - Compensation	DS	L-2	Plant (AP)	N	-	Y	Y	-	-
VIb	UF	Acting - Compensation	RKS	L-4	Plant (PP)	-	-	N	-	-	-

F - Favourable

UF - Unfavourable

Y - Yes

N - No

NP - Non Plant

NDD - Note of Dissent

* - Identity of the grievants has not been disclosed due to the sensitive nature of the information obtained from them.

Appendix-D

Hierarchy of Positions in the
Steel Workers' Union

President

Vice President

Treasurer

General Secretary

Deputy General Secretary

Senior Secretary

Secretary

Working Committee Member

Shop Representative

Active Member

Appendix-E

The Union Representatives' Case

MQA and BSR were two technicians in the steel melting shop, whose services were terminated for a serious charge of misconduct, after a disciplinary enquiry committee indicted them. They challenged the findings of the Enquiry Committee and filed a stage-III grievance (in termination cases, one can directly file a stage-III grievance, without going through stage-I and stage-II), demanding their immediate reinstatement.

This was a very special case, since it involved termination of two persons, who were both union leaders at shop level - one being an "active member" and other a shop representative. Termination of services of the powerful Union's functionaries was unprecedented in ISP's history and was seen as a serious potential threat for the peaceful industrial relations by the Management.

Case was taken up immediately by the grievance machinery, ahead of the pending grievance cases. Series of meetings and long drawn deliberations were held over a period of more than a month. There were meetings outside the grievance committee, involving top level Union and Management functionaries. There were protests and unrest in the shop to which the two grievants belonged. Grievance committee had to work under all these pulls and pressures from both the Union and the Management.

In the grievance committee meetings, Management representatives took the stand that, since the grievants have challenged the very basis of the enquiry, the case should go to an appellate body and not to the grievance committee. On the other hand, the Union wanted the case to be deliberated in the committee, since it was a bi-partite forum, where they could be directly involved in decision-making.

In reality, the case and the enquiry committee's report was discussed in the grievance committee meetings. Union forcefully argued for reinstatement of the grievants.

Nevertheless, management did not let all the initiative go out of their hands. They did not let the final decision be taken in the committee meeting. Instead, the committee only put forward a recommendation to the DGM (Personnel), who finally reinstated them, but reduced their grades by one each. Moreover, they were posted in the administrative departments outside the plant so that their influence among their colleagues gets diminished.

The case description involving formal as well as informal deliberations was build up through interviews of a large number of individuals involved in the case. Then the case was analysed from a political perspective: key actors were identified, their sources of power/handicaps assessed and their influence tactics over one-another listed. A summary of this analysis is given in Table-1. Finally, the outcome of the case was analysed vis-a-vis the sources of power and influence tactics of the key actors.

A Summary Analysis of Union Representatives' Case

S.No.	Actor	Sources of Power/ Handicaps		Influence Tactics	
1	Grievant (MOA, BSR) (G)	+ Shop level Union representative (MOA) & active Union Member (BSR) + Following in a critical shop + Support among mili- tant Union leadership - Unpopular with the traditional Union leadership - Already terminated	G → G.S. →	G → D.G.S.	G → C.F.
				+ Provoke shop protests + Garner support from the militant Union leadership	+ Defiance of enquiry + Demand reinsta- tement + Provoke protests in the shop + Support of militant section of Union leadership
2	Secretary, Grievance Committee (G.S.)	+ knowledge of the formal procedure/ rules + Information on precedence/access to records	G.S. → G -	G.S. → D.G.S.	G.S. → C.F.
				+ Uphold procedure + Stick to precedence	* Procedure * Precedence
3	Deputy General Secretary, Union (DGS)	+ Position in the Union	D.G.S. → G * Strong support to Grievant	D.G.S. → B.S.	D.G.S. → C.F.
				* Challenge enquiry * Disregard precedence and procedure	+ Challenge enquiry + Threat to stop the plant + Pressure tactics + Disregard proce- dure/precedence
4	Chairperson Grievance Committee (C.F.)	+ Position in the organization	C.F. → G. + Uphold procedure + Teach a lesson	C.F. → F.G.	C.F. → D.G.S.
				+ Support G.E. in the begin- ning	+ Defend enquiry + Follow procedure + Resist Union + Top priority to the case + Resist Union pressure in the beginning finally yield partially

+ Sources of power
- Handicaps

* Arrow indicates the direction of influence.

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NOTES

1. Although, through these sources, finally the power devolves to the individual, our understanding is that its basis is the unique position of an individual in an organization. By position here we mean both its formal - organizationally sanctioned aspects, as well as informal aspects. In our opinion, individual differences come into the picture in terms of power articulation - how the sources are mobilised and used to further an individual's interests. Nevertheless, we do not deny that an individual can, at times, derive some power from the sources which have nothing to do with the organization. But this is the less significant aspect of sources of power in organizations and not the focus of the present discussion.
2. We have not disclosed the identity of the organization, since the data on grievances may be sensitive for the organization. Infact, this may be the reason for the paucity of qualitative studies on the working of grievance resolution in organizations.
3. In India, all the main trade unions in the country are affiliates of some political party or the other.
4. This power is further multiplied due to the fact that ISP is a public sector undertaking and the management had to take their orders from the political leadership of the same party to which SWU belongs.
5. At times, an individual might have some personal handicaps because of his/her position or a wrong move. Our data suggested that, in order to have a proper understanding of an individual's power, we need to take into account not only sources of power but also the handicaps of the individual (Varman, 1994).
6. We have not disclosed the names of the individuals, because of the sensitive nature of the information shared by them.

