Political models

Central features of political models

Political models embrace those theories which characterize decision-making as a bargaining process. They assume that organizations are political arenas whose members engage in political activity in pursuit of their interests. Analysis focuses on the distribution of power and influence in organizations and on the bargaining and negotiation between interest groups. Conflict is regarded as endemic within organizations, and management is directed towards the regulation of political behaviour. The definition below incorporates the main elements of these approaches.

> Political models assume that in organizations, policy and decisions emerge through a process of negotiation and bargaining. Interest groups develop and form alliances in pursuit of particular policy objectives. Conflict is viewed as a natural phenomenon and power accrues to dominant coalitions rather than being the preserve of formal leaders.

Political models in schools and other educational institutions are often described as 'micropolitics' (Ball, 1987; Hoyle, 1999). Mawhinney defines micropolitics as:

the interaction and political ideologies of social systems of teachers, administrators, teachers and pupils within school buildings. These may

> be viewed as internal organizational subsystems. Micropolitical analysis is also concerned with external system issues such as those arising in the interaction between professional and lay subsystems. (1999: 161)

Micropolitics are important examples of political models but there are other political approaches that are not described as 'micropolitical'. Hence the wider concept of 'political models' is used in this volume. Deal (2005: 112) prefers the notion of 'frame'. 'The political frame relinquishes goals and needs in favour of the law of the jungle: scarce resources, competing interests and the role of power and conflict in determining both direction and outcomes … leadership is essentially political'.

Politics tend to be regarded as the concern of central and local government and to be associated strongly with the political parties who compete for our votes at national, provincial and local elections. It is useful to loosen this close identity between government and politics before seeking to apply political metaphors to educational institutions.

National and local politics strongly influence the context within which schools and colleges operate. In most societies, central government determines the broad character of the educational system and this is inevitably underpinned by the political views of the majority party. In England, for example, the 1988 Education Reform Act, and subsequent legislation, set the framework within which schools and colleges must operate. Similarly, the South African Schools Act (1996) provides the basis for the post-Apartheid education system.

Local politics have become less influential in England since the 1988 Act which allocated many former local authority (LA) responsibilities to central government or to the educational institutions. However, LAs retain the power to determine the financial position of most schools through their control over the funding formula. The elements of the formula, and their weighting, are the product of the political judgements of the majority party, within the limitations laid down in the legislation.

While national and local government determine the broad framework for education, political models apply to schools, colleges and other organizations just as much as they relate to political parties:

> I take schools, in common with virtually all other social organizations, to be riven with actual or potential conflict between members; to be poorly coordinated; to be ideologically diverse. I take it to be essential that if we are to understand the nature of schools as organizations, we must achieve some understanding of these conflicts. (Ball, 1987: 19)

West (1999) points out that the international trend towards self-management in education expands the scope for political activity. As

schools have greater responsibility for their own affairs, so the potential for conflict inevitably increases:

> The majority of decisions that concern teachers, and the responsibility for planning the individual school's future, now reside within the school ... schools in England and Wales have never offered more scope for micropolitical influence than they do now – within the self-managing school. We can speculate, therefore, that there has never been a time when an awareness of micropolitical processes and interactions was more useful to headteachers. (West, 1999: 190)

Hoyle (1999) makes a useful distinction between policy and management micropolitics:

> The concerns of policy micropolitics are essentially transboundary; how micropolitics constitute the means by which school staff respond to external pressures, e.g. resistance, retreatism, ritualism. Management micropolitics faces in the direction of the strategies whereby school leaders and teachers pursue their interests in the context of the management of the school ... although micropolitics is concerned with strategies deployed in the conflict of interests between teachers, perhaps the main focus is the conflict of interests between school leaders and teachers. (Ibid.: 214)

Baldridge's (1971) ground-breaking research in universities in the United States concluded that the political model, rather than the formal or collegial perspectives, best captured the realities of life in higher education:

> When we look at the complex and dynamic processes that explode on the modern campus today, we see neither the rigid, formal aspects of bureaucracy nor the calm consensus-directed elements of an academic collegium. On the contrary ... [interest groups] emerge ... These groups articulate their interests in many different ways, bringing pressure on the decision-making process from any number of angles ... Power and influence, once articulated, go through a complex process until policies are shaped, reshaped and forged out of the competing claims of multiple groups. (1971: 19–20)

Political models may be just as valid for schools and colleges as they are for universities.

Political models have the following major features:

1. They tend to focus on *group activity* rather than the institution as a whole. The emphasis is on sub-units such as departments or faculties, not the school or college level. Interaction between groups is at the heart of political approaches whereas formal and collegial models stress the institutional level: 'The basic unit of traditional political analysis is the sub group ... the basic unit of an apolitical

perspective is the total system' (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980).

Most schools and colleges are complex organizations and there are several different types of group. West (1999: 190) distinguishes between formal and informal groups. The former 'are created in order to fulfil specific goals and carry on specific tasks which are clearly linked to the school's overall mission'. Formal groups may be either permanent (the senior management, subject departments, etc.) or temporary (working parties or task forces). Informal groups exist to meet teachers' need for affiliation and can take many forms. Typically, they have their own leader and certain norms or rituals that underpin group behaviour (West, 1999).

Cranston (2008: 16) applies micropolitical theory to his analysis of senior management teams and argues that 'knowledge and understanding of micropolitics is useful in enhancing the operations and effectiveness of SMTs'.

Ball (1987) refers to 'baronial politics' and discusses the nature of conflict between the leaders of subgroups:

> In the middle ages the conflicts between English barons were essentially concerned with two matters: wealth and power. In the school the concerns and interests of academic and pastoral barons are fundamentally the same: allocations from the budget ... and influence over school policies. (Ibid.: 221)

Lindle (1999: 171) also stresses the significance of the competition for resources in fuelling political activity. 'The perennially scarce resources of schools ... provide the nutrients for school-based political activity'. Wallace and Hall's (1994) research on school management teams (SMTs) in England and Wales shows how issues of power and resources were strongly evident in the work of SMTs and in their relationships with other staff in the school.

2. Political models are concerned with *interests* and *interest groups*. Individuals are thought to have a variety of interests which they pursue within the organization. Morgan (1997: 161) explains their significance within the political model:

> In talking about 'interests', we are talking about pre-dispositions embracing goals, values, desires, expectations, and other orientations and inclinations that lead a person to act in one way rather than another. In everyday life, we tend to think of interests in a spatial way: as areas of concern that we wish to preserve or enlarge or as positions that we wish to protect or achieve ... the flow of politics is intimately connected with this way of positioning ourselves.

Hoyle (1986) distinguishes between personal and professional interests:

> Professional interests ... centre on commitments to a particular cur-
> riculum, syllabus, mode of pupil grouping, teaching method, etc ...
> professional interests become part of the micropolitical process accord-
> ing to the strategies used to further them. Personal interests focus on
> such issues as status, promotion and working conditions. (1986: 128)

Hoyle (1982) points to the development of interest groups as a prin-
cipal means of seeking and achieving individual aims:

> Interests are pursued by individuals but frequently they are most effec-
> tively pursued in collaboration with others who share a common
> concern. Some of these may have the qualities of a group in that they
> are relatively enduring and have a degree of cohesion, but others ... will
> be looser associations of individuals who collaborate only infrequently
> when a common interest comes to the fore. (1982: 89)

The more permanent formal groups, such as departments, tend to be
cohesive because of shared values and beliefs. The individuals
within such groups often have common attitudes towards many of
the central issues in schools and colleges, although this was not the
case with the departments in Brown, Boyle and Boyle's (2000) 'Type
C' secondary schools where there was only limited co-operative
working between and among staff colleagues. However, there are
usually greater differences in goals and values *between* interest
groups, leading to fragmentation rather than organizational unity.
On particular issues, groups may form alliances to press for policies
which reflect their joint interests. These coalitions may well be tem-
porary, disbanding when certain objectives have been achieved,
while the interest groups themselves often have enduring signifi-
cance. Caffyn (2010: 336) notes the fragmentation that arises in
international schools because of cultural diversity and the transient
nature of the teaching force.

3. Political models stress the prevalence of *conflict* in organizations.
   Interest groups pursue their independent objectives which may con-
   trast sharply with the aims of other sub-units within the institution
   and lead to conflict between them, or what Salo (2008: 502)
   describes as 'disputation'. 'Micropolitics is about conflict, and how
   people compete to get what they want in the face of scarce resources'
   (Mawhinney, 1999: 167–8).

   An important feature of political perspectives is the view that conflict
   is a normal feature of organizations (Deal, 2005: 112). Collegial models
   have a strong harmony bias and the possibility of disagreement is
   ignored or assumed away. In contrast, Morgan (1997) argues that con-
   flict is the inevitable outcome of a clash of interests and interest groups:

> Conflict arises whenever interests collide. The natural reaction to con-
> flict in organisational contexts is usually to view it as a dysfunctional
> force that can be attributed to some regrettable set of circumstances or
> causes. 'It's a personality problem' ... Conflict is regarded as an unfortu-
> nate state that in more favourable circumstances would disappear ... [In
> practice] conflict will always be present in organisations ... its source
> rests in some perceived or real divergence of interests. (Ibid.: 167)

Caffyn (2010: 336) comments that, in international schools, transna-
tional groups come into conflict with schools and educational systems.
Milliken's (2001) study of a business school within a United Kingdom
university also illustrates the prevalence of conflict. The school is
divided into four specific divisions, each with its own goals. The inter-
action between these groups often generates conflict:

> The interest groups cluster around the divergent values and this clus-
> tering is socially evident even to the organisation of their coffee breaks
> when members within a division often have their breaks together in
> the staff common room – a form of micro-political apartheid. (Ibid.: 78)

Vestiges of the Apartheid period remain in the experience of black
teachers working in South Africa's former whites-only city schools.
Many of them report that they are marginalized and often excluded
from formal and social groups (Bush and Moloi, 2007).
4. Political models assume that the *goals* of organizations are unstable,
ambiguous and contested. Individuals, interest groups and coalitions
have their own purposes and act towards their achievement. Goals
may be disputed and then become a significant element in the conflict
between groups. Certain sub-units succeed in establishing their goals as
the objectives of the institution while other interests seek to supplant
the official purposes with their own objectives. Bolman and Deal
(1991) explain the fluid nature of goals in political settings:

> Traditional views of organisations ... assume that organisations have,
> or ought to have, clear and consistent goals. Generally, the goals are
> presumed to be established by those in authority ... The political frame,
> however, insists that organisational goals are set through negotiations
> among the members of coalitions. Different individuals and groups
> have different objectives and resources, and each attempts to bargain
> with other members or coalitions to influence goals and decision-mak-
> ing processes. (Ibid.: 190)

Interest groups are likely to promote their objectives in a variety of
ways until they are supported by the policy-makers. This does not
necessarily end the conflict because the endorsement of one set of
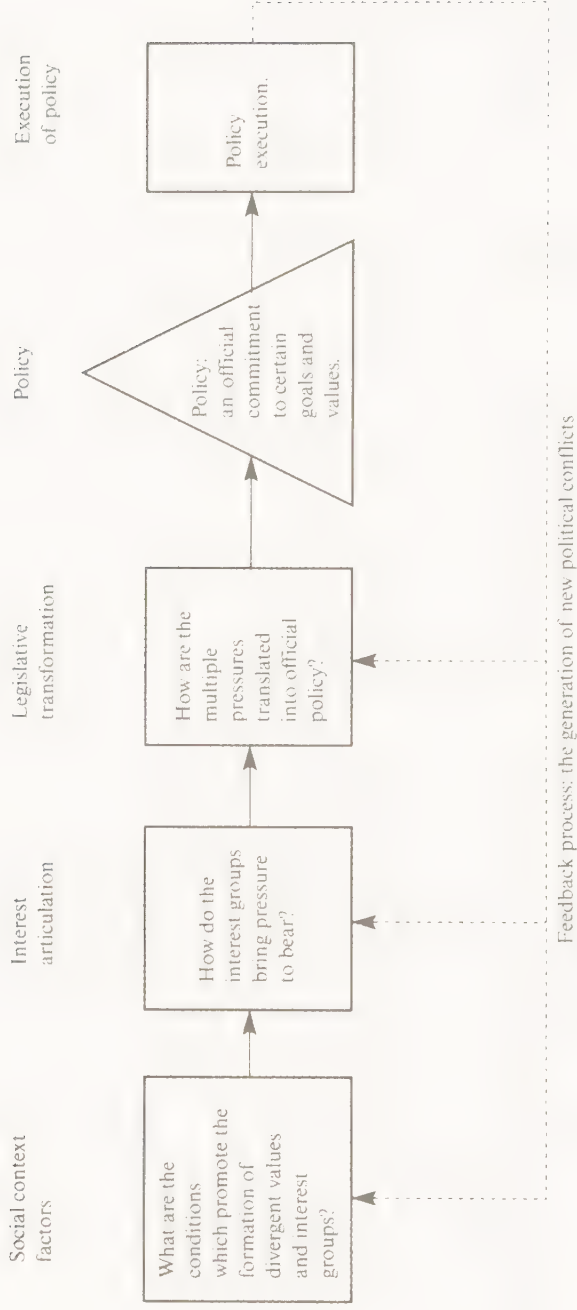purposes tends to be at the expense of other goals, whose propo-

nents may continue to lobby for their own ideas. Disagreement over goals is a continuing feature of the policy process in organizations.

5. As noted above, decisions within political arenas emerge after a complex process of *bargaining and negotiation*. Formal models assume that decisions follow a rational process. Options are evaluated in terms of the objectives of the organization and the most appropriate alternative is selected. Policy-making in political settings is a more uncertain business. Interests are promoted in committees and at numerous unofficial encounters between participants. Policies cannot easily be judged in terms of the goals of the institution because these are subject to the same process of internal debate and subsequent change. The objectives are a moving target, as Bolman and Deal (1991: 186) suggest: organisational goals and decisions emerge from ongoing processes of bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among members of different coalitions. Referring to Norwegian schools, Elstad (2008: 397) claims that bargaining is 'ubiquitous' and adds that teacher coalitions can strengthen interest groups' bargaining power.

   The emphasis on the several stages of decision-making is significant because it multiplies the opportunities available to interest groups to exert influence on the policy process. Decisions on a subject at one forum do not necessarily resolve the issue because the unsuccessful groups are likely to pursue the matter whenever opportunities arise or can be engineered. Salo (2008: 497) notes that 'organisations are characterized by constant negotiations of pluralistic meanings' while Hoyle and Wallace (2005) comment that mediation is required to resolve disagreements.

6. The concept of *power* is central to all political theories. The outcomes of the complex decision-making process are likely to be determined according to the relative power of the individuals and interest groups involved in the debate. Salo (2008: 500) describes this process as 'a continuing struggle for control, power and influence'. Participants mobilize resources of power which are deployed in support of their interests and have a significant impact on policy outcomes. 'Power is the medium through which conflicts of interest are ultimately resolved. Power influences who gets what, when and how ... the sources of power are rich and varied' (Morgan, 1997: 170–1). Deal (2005: 113) stresses the need for leaders to consolidate their 'power base'.

   The nature and sources of power in education are examined on pages 108–112.

Social context
factors

Interest
articulation

Legislative
transformation

Policy

Execution
of policy

What are the
conditions
which promote the
formation of
divergent values
and interest
groups?

How do the
interest groups
bring pressure
to bear?

How are the
multiple
pressures
translated
into official
policy?

Policy:
an official
commitment
to certain
goals and
values.

Policy
execution.

Feedback process: the generation of new political conflicts

Figure 5.1 A political model (from Baldridge, 1971)

Baldridge's political model

Several of the ideas discussed in the previous section, notably the notion of stages of decision-making, are addressed in the classical political model developed by Baldridge (1971). The author considers the formation of interest groups and discusses the ways in which policies emerge from the kaleidoscope of conflicting pressures (see Figure 5.1). Baldridge postulates five stages in the policy process:

1. A *social structure* is a configuration of social groups with basically different lifestyles and political interests. These differences often lead to conflict, for what is in the interest of one group may damage another. The social structure, with its fragmented groups, divergent goal aspiration, and conflicting claims on the decision-makers, is the setting for political behaviour. Many conflicts have their roots in the complexity of the social structure and in the complex goals and values held by divergent groups.
2. *Interest articulation* is the process by which interests are advanced. Groups with conflicting values and goals must translate them into effective influence if they are to obtain favourable action by legislative bodies. How does a powerful group exert its pressure, what threats or promises can it make, and how does it translate its desires into political capital? There are many forms of interest articulation and it assumes a multitude of shapes.
3. The *legislative stage* is the process by which articulated interests are translated into policies. Legislative bodies respond to pressures, transforming the conflict into politically feasible policy. In the process many claims are played off against one another, negotiations are undertaken, compromises are forged, and rewards are divided. Committees meet, commissions report, negotiators bargain, and powerful people 'haggle' about the policy.
4. The *formulation of policy* is the end result of the legislative stage. The articulated interests have gone through conflict and compromise stages and the final legislative action is taken. The policy is the official climax to the conflict and represents an authoritative, binding decision to commit the organization to one set of possible alternative actions, to one set of goals and values.
5. Finally the *execution of policy* occurs. The conflict comes to a climax, the battle is at least officially over, and the resulting policy is turned over to the bureaucrats for routine execution. This may not be the end of the matter, however, for two things are likely to happen. First, the major losers in the conflict may take up their arms again for a new round of interest articulation. Second, the execution of policy

inevitably causes a feedback cycle, in which the policy generates new
tensions, new vested interests, and a new cycle of political conflict.
(Baldridge, 1971: 23–4)

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Baldridge model is that it is
essentially iterative. The policy-making process is rarely straightfor-
ward. Rather, it is capable of breakdown at any stage, as opposing
interests coalesce to defeat proposals and seek to substitute their own
plans. This leads to the feedback processes which inevitably follow the
breakdown of particular proposals. Ultimately, the success or failure of
interest groups in promoting their objectives depends on the resources
of power which they are able to mobilize.

Sources of power in education

Power may be regarded as the ability to determine the behaviour of
others or to decide the outcomes of conflict. Where there is disagree-
ment, it is likely to be resolved according to the relative resources of
power available to the participants.

There are many sources of power, but in broad terms a distinction
can be made between authority and influence. *Authority* is legitimate
power which is vested in leaders within formal organizations. Author-
ity involves a legal right to make decisions which may be supported by
sanctions. 'Authorities are defined essentially as the people who are
entitled to make binding decisions' (Bolman and Deal, 1991: 193).
School heads and principals typically have substantial authority by
virtue of their formal leadership positions.

Influence represents an ability to affect outcomes and depends on
personal characteristics and expertise. Bacharach and Lawler (1980: 44)
identify seven distinctions between authority and influence:

1. Authority is the static, structural aspect of power in organizations;
   influence is the dynamic, tactical element.
2. Authority is the formal aspect of power; influence is the informal
   aspect.
3. Authority refers to the formally sanctioned right to make final deci-
   sions; influence is not sanctioned by the organization and is,
   therefore, not a matter of organizational rights.
4. Authority implies involuntary submission by subordinates; influ-
   ence implies voluntary submission and does not necessarily entail a
   superior–subordinate relationship.

5. Authority flows downward, and it is unidirectional; influence is multidirectional and can flow upward, downward, or horizontally.
6. The source of authority is solely structural; the source of influence may be personal characteristics, expertise, or opportunity.
7. Authority is circumscribed, that is, the domain, scope, and legitimacy of the power are specifically and clearly delimited; influence is uncircumscribed, that is, its domain, scope, and legitimacy are typically ambiguous.

As we noted in Chapter 1, formal authority is often associated with management while influence is the key dimension of leadership. Heads and principals possess positional authority and have the formal power to impose their views. Leadership may arise in any part of the organization and relies on personal qualities and attributes.

Hoyle (1982) points to the ways in which these two aspects of power operate within educational institutions:

> Influence differs from authority in having a number of sources in the organization, in being embedded in the actual relationships between groups rather than located in an abstract legal source, and is not fixed but is variable and operates through bargaining, manipulation, exchange and so forth. The head teacher in Britain has a high degree of authority; but [the] exercise of that authority is increasingly modified as teachers' sources of influence … increase and thus involves the head in a greater degree of exchange and bargaining behaviour. (Ibid.: 90)

There are six significant forms of power relevant to schools and colleges:

1. *Positional power.* A major source of power in any organization is that accruing to individuals who hold an *official position* in the institution. Formal positions confer authority on their holders, who have a recognized right to make decisions or to play a key role in the policy-making process. Handy (1993: 128) says that positional power is 'legal' or 'legitimate' power. In schools, the head is regarded as the legitimate leader and possesses legal authority which is inevitably a key determinant of school policy. Other staff who hold senior posts may also exercise positional power. These may include deputy or associate principals, heads of department and pastoral leaders. Chairs of governing bodies or school boards may also exert positional power within self-managing schools and colleges. Cameron (2010) also points to the power exercised by external partners, for example the Secondary National Strategy (SNS) consultant in London: 'The SNS consultant has reinforced the influence or power that secondary school hierarchies have over teachers and departments'

(ibid.: 356). In a hierarchy, the more highly placed individuals exert the greater authority:

> The first and most obvious source of power in an organization is formal authority, a form of legitimized power that is respected and acknowledged by those with whom one interacts ... legitimacy is a form of social approval that is essential for stabilizing power relations. It arises when people recognize that a person has a right to rule some area of human life and that it is their duty to obey. (Morgan, 1997: 172)

2. *Authority of expertise*. In professional organizations there is a significant reservoir of power available to those who possess appropriate *expertise*. Handy (1993: 130) says that 'expert power is the power that is vested in someone because of their acknowledged expertise ... In a meritocratic tradition people do not resent being influenced by those whom they regard as the experts'. Schools and colleges employ many staff who have specialist knowledge of aspects of the curriculum. The music specialist, for example, is regarded as the expert in their field, and principals may be cautious in substituting their own judgements for those of their heads of department in curricular matters. In certain circumstances, there may be conflict between formal leaders and experts but the outcome is by no means certain:

> Expert power relates to the use of knowledge and expertise as a means of legitimizing what one wishes to do. 'The expert' often carries an aura of authority and power that can add considerable weight to a decision that rests in the balance. (Morgan, 1997: 181)

3. *Personal power*. Individuals who are charismatic or possess verbal skills or certain other characteristics may be able to exercise *personal power*. Staff who are able to influence behaviour or decisions by virtue of personal abilities or qualities are often thought to possess the attributes of charismatic leadership. These personal skills are independent of the power accruing to individuals by virtue of their position in the organization. In school staff rooms, for example, there are often individuals who command the respect of colleagues because of their perceived wisdom or insight. These teachers may become alternative leaders whose views are sought on the key issues. 'Individuals with charisma, political skills, verbal facility, or the capacity to articulate vision are powerful by virtue of their personal characteristics, in addition to whatever other power they may have' (Bolman and Deal, 1991: 197).

4. *Control of rewards*. Power is likely to be possessed to a significant degree by individuals who have *control of rewards*. They are inevitably

perceived as powerful by those who value such returns. In education, rewards may include promotion, good references and allocation to favoured classes or groups. Individuals who control or influence the allocation of these benefits may be able to determine the behaviour of teachers who seek one or more of the rewards. Typically, the head or principal is the major arbiter of promotion and references, although advice may be sought from heads of department or others who possess relevant knowledge or information. Classes may be allocated by heads of department. This form of power represents a means of control over aspiring teachers but may have little influence on those staff who choose to spurn these rewards. Control of rewards may be regarded as authority rather than influence where it emanates from the leader acting in an official capacity.

5. *Coercive power*. The mirror image of the control of rewards may be *coercive power*. This implies the ability to enforce compliance with a request or requirement. Coercion is backed by the threat of sanctions. 'Coercive power rests on the ability to constrain, to block, to interfere, or to punish' (Bolman and Deal, 1991: 196).

   Heads and principals may exercise coercive power by threatening not to supply a good reference for external applications or warning about the prospects for internal promotion. In certain circumstances, coercion may be used in conjunction with the control of rewards to manipulate the behaviour of others. This 'carrot and stick' combination may have a powerful double effect on staff and may be a latent factor in all schools and colleges. Wallace and Hall (1994: 33) question the legitimacy of such manipulative actions: 'We suggest that action ... is manipulative either where it is a conscious attempt, covertly, to influence events through means or ends which are not made explicit; or where it is illegitimate, whether overt or not.'

6. *Control of resources*. Control of the *distribution of resources* may be an important source of power in educational institutions, particularly in self-managing schools and colleges. Decisions about the allocation of resources are likely to be among the most significant aspects of the policy process in such organizations. Resources include revenue and capital finance, but also human and material resources such as staff and equipment. Control of these resources may give power over those people who wish to acquire them. There is often competition between interest groups for additional resources and success or failure in acquiring extra finance, staff and other resources is an indicator of the relative power of individuals and groups:

> Resource management is … a micropolitical process, providing an arena within which participants compete for the resources which will enable them to develop programmes of activity which embody their values, further their interests and help to provide legitimation for the activities in which they are engaged. (Simkins, 1998: 110)

While these six forms of power might be regarded as the most significant, Bolman and Deal (1991), Handy (1993) and Morgan (1997) identify several other sources, including:

- physical power
- developing alliances and networks
- access to and control of agendas
- control of meanings and symbols
- control of boundaries
- gender and the management of gender relations.

Consideration of all these sources of power leads to the conclusion that heads and principals possess substantial resources of authority and influence. They have the capacity to determine many institutional decisions and to affect the behaviour of their colleagues. However, they do not have absolute power. Other leaders and staff also have power, arising principally from their personal qualities and expertise, although Young and Brooks (2004) show that part-time teachers, for example, are often marginalized. Lay governors may also be powerful, particularly if they chair the governing board or one of its important committees. These other sources of power may act as a counterbalance to the head's positional authority and control of rewards.

Political strategies in education

Educational leaders may adopt one or more political strategies in order to maintain or extend their control or to ensure a favoured outcome to a decision-making process. Using their significant resources of power, they are often able to ensure support for, or compliance with, their preferred position. Hoyle (1986: 140–6) outlines some of the more significant strategies:

1. *Dividing and ruling*. This may involve heads arranging separate 'deals' with individuals or departments, for example in respect of resource allocation.
2. *Co-optation*. This entails the involvement of those who support the leader or whose potential opposition has to be diverted. It may be used simply to involve a certain individual in the decision-making

process or may be an attempt to manipulate the outcome.

3. *Displacement*. This occurs where the apparent issue is used to cloak the real purpose of the participant. A good example is where personal interests, such as status, are presented as 'professional'. This might occur where heads of department argue for more time for their subject.

4. *Controlling information*. Information is an important source of power. Heads and principals are the main recipients of external information and may use this to influence decisions. Curriculum specialists may also receive information related to their specific expertise.

5. *Controlling meetings*. Leaders may be able to control the outcomes of meetings by using one or more of the following devices:

(a) 'rigging' agendas
(b) 'losing' recommendations
(c) 'nobbling' members of the group
(d) 'invoking' outside bodies
(e) 'massaging' minutes.

Political models: goals, structure, environment and leadership

Goals

Political models differ from both the formal and collegial approaches in that they focus primarily on the *goals* of sub-units, or looser groups of individuals, rather than the objectives of the institution itself. Ball (1987: 11) claims that the focus on organizational goals in much of the literature is a 'major distortion' and he prefers to emphasize the goal diversity of organizations, as does Caffyn (2010).

These models assume that groups advance their interests in the form of goals that are pursued vigorously within the institution. The collegial assumption that there is agreement over the goals of the organization is challenged by political theorists who argue that there is no such consensus: 'An assumption of consensus ... has extremely limited validity in almost all types of organizations' (Ball, 1987: 11).

Schools and colleges have multiple goals reflecting their various interest groups. These groups endeavour to promote their own objectives as the official purposes of the institution. Inevitably, the goals of the various groups sometimes conflict with one another because a focus on one objective may be at the expense of another: 'Goals may be inherently in conflict and ... these conflicts will become manifest when the goals are given a specific form in terms of pedagogy or curriculum' (Hoyle, 1986: 58).

Brown, Boyle and Boyle (2000: 43–44) point to the risk of apparently collegial frameworks becoming political. Their research with secondary school departments in England suggests that they develop sub-cultures which lead to the formulation of common aims and enables 'jointly held beliefs and values to flourish', but is separate from that of other departments and from the values of the senior management team, leading to an essentially micropolitical structure.

As a result of this inter-group conflict, goals tend to be ambiguous, unstable and contested. Bolman and Deal (1991: 189) stress that 'organisational goals arise not from fiat at the top, but from an ongoing process of negotiation and interaction among the key players in any system'. The capacity to secure institutional backing for group objectives depends crucially on the power of the interest group and the ability of its members to mobilize support from other sub-units and institutional leaders. There is a continuing process of negotiation and alliance building to muster sufficient support for the group's policy objectives. Goals are unstable because alliances break down and new factors are introduced into the bargaining process. The extant objectives may be usurped by purposes advanced by new coalitions of interests.

Ultimately, goals become 'organizational' according to the resources of power that can be mobilized in their support. The purposes of the most powerful groups emerge as organizational goals.

Organizational structure

Political models assume that *organizational structure* emerges from the process of bargaining and negotiation and may be subject to change as the interest groups jockey for position. Formal and collegial approaches present structure as a stable aspect of the organization, while political theorists regard it as one of the uncertain and conflictual elements of the institution. The structure is developed not so much for organizational effectiveness, as formal theorists suggest, but rather to determine which interests are to be served by the organization: 'Organisational structures[s] ... are often understood as products and reflections of a struggle for political control ... organizational structure is frequently used as a political instrument' (Morgan, 1997: 175–6).

Schools and colleges provide many illustrations of structure being established or adapted following political activity. A management team drawn primarily from heads of department, for example, may be seen as a device to reinforce their baronial power. Deal (2005: 114) advises leaders to use structure as a political asset: 'Politically, it is a way for a leader to consolidate power, reward allies or punish opponents'.

Hoyle (1986) argues that schools are particularly prone to political activity because of their 'loosely-coupled' structure (see Chapter 7). The partial autonomy of teachers and their authority of expertise, together with the sectional interests of different sub-units, leads to this structural looseness and the prevalence of 'micropolitics':

> The loosely-coupled structure of the school invites micropolitical activity since, although the head has a high degree of authority and responsibility, the relative autonomy of teachers and the norms of the teaching profession serve to limit the pervasiveness and scope of this power ... Thus heads frequently have recourse to micropolitical strategies in order to have their way. But teachers, too, are not without their micropolitical resources. (Hoyle, 1986: 171)

Secondary schools in many countries experience political activity because of their highly differentiated structure. In the Netherlands, for example, there are two parallel structures representing subject departments and student guidance units. Imants, Sleegers and Witziers (2001: 290) argue that these are 'conflicting sub-structures', leading to tension, fragmentation and barriers between teachers of different subjects.

The external environment

Political models emphasize the significance of *external influences* on internal decision-making. The political process includes inputs from outside bodies and individuals which are often mediated by the internal participants. Sergiovanni (1984) explains the nature of the interaction between educational institutions and external groups:

> The political perspective is concerned with the dynamic interplay of the organisation with forces in its external environment. Schools and universities, for example, are viewed as open rather than closed systems, as integral parts of a larger environment not as bounded entities isolated from their environment. They receive inputs, process them, and return outputs to the environment. Inputs are presumed to be diverse and output demands often conflicting. As a result there is constant interplay between school and environment. (Ibid.: 6)

In this respect, political approaches are similar to the open systems theories considered in Chapter 3. The major difference concerns the ways in which external pressures are imported into school or college decision-making. In formal models, it is assumed that outside influences are transmitted through heads or principals whose knowledge of the external environment reinforces their official

authority. The leaders' interpretation of these pressures may then be a significant element in the decision-making process.

In political models it is thought that external factors may be introduced by interest groups as well as by heads and principals. School or college staff whose courses are vulnerable because of low enrolments may cite evidence from employers who value the threatened courses. These environmental pressures mingle with the internal factors and add to the complexity and ambiguity of decision-making.

The various groups which have an interest in educational institutions tend to have rather different motivations for their involvement. Official bodies may be concerned about educational standards, or 'value for money', and may exert their authority through the head or principal. Unofficial groups usually pursue sectional interests. Employers may want the school to instil particular skills, while parents understandably focus on the progress of their own children. These pressures may be transmitted through the staff most involved with their interests, rather than via the leader. Lindle (1999), referring to the American context, points to the importance of managing the competing demands of diverse community groups:

> The school setting is more political due to the increasing and competing demands placed on schooling … No one said that public schooling was easy, but its public mission and visibility in the community make it an easy political target. The intimate relationship between schools and communities creates micropolitics. While the context of school is indelibly situated in a larger community, all communities are inherently political. (Ibid.: 173)

In many countries, teacher unions have a significant impact on schools and may provide a counterpoint to the official authority of principals. The South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), for example, has a powerful influence on school leadership and management. Bush et al. (2009) report that SADTU secured the agreement of the Mpumalanga provincial Education Department for teachers to leave the school for several hours to attend a union meeting. Principals were advised to 'ensure' that this did not disrupt classes but this was impossible to achieve as so many educators were missing.

The management of the external environment is a significant issue for leaders and participants in political organizations. Control of the 'boundary' between schools and their environments is an important source of influence in the debate about policies and resources. Knowledge about the opinions and predilections of clients and interest groups confers power:

> By monitoring and controlling boundary transactions, people are able to build up considerable power ... Most people in leadership positions at all levels of an organization can engage in this kind of boundary management in a way that contributes to their power. (Morgan, 1997: 181)

Hoyle (1999: 217) adds that 'the nature of micropolitics has changed with the increasing permeability of the school boundary' – an explicit recognition that the greater the decentralization of power to self-managing schools, the greater the requirement for effective boundary management within what is essentially a political framework. Governing boards have a political role in representing community interests and harmonizing them with the aims and culture of the school.

Leadership

There are two central facets of leadership within political arenas. First, the head or principal is a key participant in the process of bargaining and negotiation. Leaders have their own values, interests and policy objectives which they seek to advance as appropriate at meetings of committees and in informal settings. Heads have substantial reserves of power which they may deploy in support of their personal and institutional goals. Leaders also have a significant impact on the nature of the internal decision-making process and can exercise a controlling influence on the proceedings of committees and other decision-making groups. West (1999) criticizes the political behaviour of British heads, arguing that they often seem to promote division rather than emphasizing the school as a whole unit. Inappropriate actions include:

> setting group against group, for example in reviewing public examination results
>
> generating win–lose competition, for example in bidding for resources
>
> isolating groups from the rest of the school, for example in the work of task groups.
>
> Even at this basic level of micropolitical understanding, all too often school leaders display a naivety that is likely to lead to frustration and discontent for many of their staff. Deliberately seeking to increase understandings of how the formal and the informal interact and, above all, reducing the 'area of struggle' between groups by creating a commitment to further the school's interests, rather than their own, are priorities for school leaders. (West, 1999: 195)

The second facet of leadership concerns heads' responsibility to sustain the viability of the organization and to develop the framework within which policies can be tested and, ultimately, receive the endorsement of the various interest groups. To achieve acceptable outcomes, leaders become mediators who attempt to build coalitions in support of policies. There is a recurring pattern of discussion with representatives of power blocks to secure a measure of agreement. Bennett (1999), drawing on her experience as a principal of two schools in Tasmania, argues that communication is a critical skill for political leaders:

> It is critical to spend the time providing updates to stake-holders through newsletters, promotional material, public relations and marketing so that the various interest groups within the community understand the background behind a decision or an action. Inside the school, developing and maintaining channels of communication ... assists the principal [in] working with interest groups ... It is the responsibility of the principal to create opportunities for educational dialogue inviting people to seek clarification and to question how or why an action has occurred or a decision has been made. (Ibid.: 199)

Portin (1998), referring to research in Belgium, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, points to the need for principals to develop 'political acumen' as part of their pre-service and in-service preparation:

> Political acumen need not be viewed pejoratively as either manipulative or dominating forms of positional power. Instead, the skills needed here are a deep understanding of the micropolitical dimension of organizational governance, the means by which constituency interests and values are expressed, and an ability to take 'soundings' of the environment in order to inform site decision making. (Ibid.: 386)

Bolman and Deal (1991) summarize several of the issues in this section, recommending four 'rules' for political leaders:

> Political leaders clarify what they want and what they can get. They are 'realists above all'.
> Political leaders assess the distribution of power and interests. They must 'map the political terrain'.
> Political leaders build linkages to other stakeholders. They 'build relationships and networks'.
> Political leaders persuade first, negotiate second, and use coercion only if necessary. Power needs to be used 'judiciously'.

Deal (2005: 110) argues that 'organisations long for leaders who are masterful politicians', to manage a 'culturally splintered' world, while

Cassidy et al. (2008) suggest that 'leaders need to harmonise a multiplicity of purposes'.

Transactional leadership

The leadership model most closely aligned with micropolitics is that of transactional leadership. This is often contrasted with the transformational leadership model examined in Chapter 4. Miller and Miller (2001) explain these twin phenomena:

> Transactional leadership is leadership in which relationships with teachers are based upon an exchange for some valued resource. To the teacher, interaction between administrators and teachers is usually episodic, short-lived and limited to the exchange transaction. Transformational leadership is more potent and complex and occurs when one or more teachers engage with others in such a way that administrators and teachers raise one another to higher levels of commitment and dedication, motivation and morality. Through the transforming process, the motives of the leader and follower merge. (Ibid.: 182)

Miller and Miller's (2001) definition refers to transactional leadership as an exchange process while Judge and Piccolo (2004: 755) add that transactional leaders 'focus on the proper exchange of resources'. Exchange is an established political strategy for members of organizations. Heads and principals possess authority arising from their positions as the formal leaders of their institutions. They also hold power in the form of key rewards such as promotion and references. However, the head requires the co-operation of staff to secure the effective management of the school. An exchange may secure benefits for both parties to the arrangement.

Judge and Piccolo (2004: 755) say that there are three dimensions of transactional leadership:

> *Contingent reward.* The degree to which the leader sets up constructive exchanges with followers
> *Management by exception – active.* Active leaders monitor follower behaviour, anticipate problems, and take corrective actions
> *Management by exception – passive.* Passive leaders wait until the behaviour has caused problems before taking action.

Bolivar and Moreno (2006) report on leadership in Spain, where principals are elected by teachers and the community. Despite the apparent democratic legitimacy of this process, the authors report that principals

are in 'permanent transaction' with colleagues, and that such processes inhibit change.

The major limitation of transactional leadership is that it does not engage staff beyond the immediate gains arising from the transaction. As Miller and Miller's definition implies, it does not produce long-term commitment to the values and vision being promoted by school leaders. However, Bass (1998: 11) stresses that leaders often use both transformational and transactional approaches: 'Consistent honouring of transactional agreements builds trust, dependability, and perceptions of consistency with leaders by followers, which are each a basis for transformational leadership'. Judge and Piccolo (2004: 765) conclude that 'transformational and transactional leadership are so highly related that it makes it difficult to separate their unique effects'.

The limitations of political models

Political models are primarily descriptive and analytical whereas most other theories tend to be normative. The focus on interests, conflict between groups, and power, provides a valid and persuasive interpretation of the decision-making process in schools and colleges. Teachers and managers often recognize the applicability of political models in their own schools and colleges. However, these theories do have five major limitations:

1. Political models are immersed so strongly in the language of power, conflict and manipulation that they neglect other standard aspects of organizations. There is little attempt to discuss the various processes of management or any real acknowledgement that most organizations operate for much of the time according to routine bureaucratic procedures. The focus is heavily on policy formulation while the implementation of policy receives little attention. Political perspectives probably understate the significance of organizational structure as a constraint on the nature of political activity. The outcomes of bargaining and negotiation are endorsed, or may falter, within the formal authority structure of the school or college. Bolman and Deal (1991: 238) say that 'the political perspective is so thoroughly focused on politics that it underestimates the significance of both rational and collaborative processes'.
2. Political models stress the influence of interest groups on decision-making and give little attention to the institutional level. The assumption is that organizations are fragmented into groups which pursue their own independent goals. These sub-units compete to estab-

lish the supremacy of their policy objectives and to secure their endorsement within the institution. This aspect of political models may be inappropriate for most English primary schools, which do not have a departmental structure or any other apparatus which could become a focal point for political activity. The institutional level may be the centre of attention for staff in these schools, invalidating the political model's emphasis on interest group fragmentation.

3. In political models there is too much emphasis on conflict and a neglect of the possibility of professional collaboration leading to agreed outcomes. The assumption that staff are continually engaged in a calculated pursuit of their own interests underestimates the capacity of teachers to work in harmony with colleagues for the benefit of their pupils and students. The focus on power as the determinant of outcomes may not be wholly appropriate for a cerebral profession such as teaching. In many situations, staff may well be engaged in genuine debate about the best outcomes for the school rather than evaluating every issue in terms of personal and group advantage: 'The [political] frame is normatively cynical and pessimistic. It overstates the inevitability of conflict and understates the potential for effective collaboration' (Bolman and Deal, 1991: 238).

4. Political models are regarded primarily as descriptive or explanatory theories. Their advocates claim that these approaches are realistic portrayals of the decision-making process in schools and colleges. Unlike collegial models, these theories are not intended to be normative or idealistic. There is no suggestion that teachers *should* pursue their own self-interest, simply an assessment, based on observation, that their behaviour is consistent with a political perspective. Nevertheless, the less attractive aspects, or 'dark side' (Cranston, 2008: 16), of political models lead to a view that they are 'intrinsically wrong' (Caffyn, 2010: 324).

> The amorality that often characterises political perspectives raises questions of values. To what extent does the political perspective, even as it purports to be simply a description of reality, ratify and sanctify some of the least humane and most unsavoury aspects of human systems? (Bolman and Deal, 1984: 146)

Morgan (1997: 212) adds that the emphasis on the cynical and the selfish may lead to the notion that there must be winners and losers and that 'the effect is to reduce the scope for genuine openness and collaboration'. Deal (2005: 112) acknowledges that political approaches may be seen as 'manipulative, dishonest and destructive' but cautions that power and conflict are 'natural by-products of co-operative activity'.

5. Political models offer valid insights into the operation of schools and colleges but it is often difficult to discern what constitutes political behaviour and what may be typical bureaucratic or collegial activity. The interpretation of group processes as either 'collegial' or 'political' is particularly difficult. Campbell and Southworth's (1993: 77) research in primary schools illustrates this point: 'It would be simplistic to say the heads in the collaborative schools controlled what happened there but they certainly exerted a great deal of influence and they sometimes used their power directly ... the heads ... revealed a micropolitical dimension to collegiality'.

Conclusion: are political models valid?

Hoyle (1986; 1999) distinguishes between theory-for-understanding, a tool for academics and students, and theory-for-action, a source of guidance for management practice. Political models are important in helping to develop understanding of how educational institutions operate. They provide rich descriptions and persuasive analysis of events and behaviour in schools and colleges. The explicit recognition of interests as prime motivators for action is valid. The acceptance that competing interests may lead to conflict, and that differential power ultimately determines the outcome, is a persuasive element in the analysis of educational institutions: 'The model of interests, conflict, and power ... provides a practical and systematic means of understanding the relationship between politics and organization and emphasizes the key role of power in determining political outcomes' (Morgan, 1997: 209).

Bolman and Deal (1991) argue that political models capture several of the essential features of institutions:

The political frame presents the only realistic portrayal of organizations ... The political frame says that power and politics are central to organizations and cannot be swept under the rug. This perspective represents an important antidote to the antiseptic rationality sometimes present in structural analysis. (Ibid.: 237)

For many teachers and school leaders, political models fit their experience of day-to-day reality in schools and provide a guide to 'theory-for-action'. Bennett (1999), a Tasmanian school principal, shows how politics have influenced practice in her schools:

Micropolitics exist in schools. It is important to consider how they are manifested and we need to move beyond saying that it is just personality

clashes or differences which leads to divisions. We need to understand that staff have different views of the world, that we can see politics in the various groups of school and, if we can recognize actors and ascertain what they are struggling over, this will influence how principals as leaders communicate, collaborate and decide courses of action. (Ibid.: 200)

Lindle (1999: 176), a school administrator in the United States, makes a similar point about politics-in-action, arguing that it is a pervasive feature in schools:

Education is a more overtly contested terrain for communities and govern-ments, teachers, parents and administrators. Schools have become more overtly political arenas in this context. The study of micropolitics is absolutely a question of survival for school leaders and other educators … Not only is the study of micropolitics inevitable, advisable and unavoidable, for most school leaders, it is an inherent occupational requirement.

In both respects, understanding and action, political models have much to offer in developing an appreciation of the nature of management in schools and colleges. Political theorists rightly draw attention to the signif-icance of groups as a potent influence on policy formulation. The emphasis on conflict may be overdrawn but it is valuable as a counterbalance to the idealistic harmony bias of collegial models. The view that disagreement is likely to be resolved ultimately by the relative power of participants is also a persuasive contribution to understanding and practice in educational institutions. Political models provide valuable insights into the operation of schools and colleges but they need to be considered alongside the formal and collegial models.

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