

Getting down and dirty – Dealing with politics

Businesses are not machines. They are communities of people, and therefore behave just like other communities. Politics is a feature of most businesses. People compete among themselves for power and resources; there are differences of opinion and of values, conflicts of priorities and of goals. To assume that your business is free of power differences is to accept that you are likely to be only 50 per cent effective, since you are dealing with only the rational part of life in business. You must be able to deal with the 'dark side of the force' to be an effective leader. The choices that are available reduce to the punk rock song 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?'. More subtle versions of this song include:

- Should I stay and contribute? This can be seen as loyalty, or pragmatism.
- Should I go? Effectively, 'I'm taking my marbles and going.'
- Should I stay and try to change the system?

Those who stay and try to change the system have two choices:

- work as **conformist innovators**, accepting the dominant values and relationships within the business and attempting to demonstrate how their activities contribute to the organisation's success criteria;
- become **deviant innovators** and, by working towards organisational success in their own way, demonstrate that their contributions provide a different yet better set of criteria for change, thereby gaining acceptance of their ideas.



Given that politics are a fact of life, it's best to be aware of the different types of games out there, so that you can deal with them in the best way.

Lessons from the dark side...

**'Only free men can negotiate. Prisoners
cannot enter into contracts.'**

Nelson Mandela