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Toward a Theory of Personal Politics

Jocelyn Fritsch[1]

Abstract

The ability to effectively navigate organizational politics to achieve one's goals has long been recognized as necessary for individuals to experience success within their organizations. Many studies have linked the effective use of political behaviors to increased individual performance. As such, many scholars within HRD and other disciplines have created practitioner techniques and models to guide individuals in their pursuit of personal success within an organization. Although these tools are useful, there is no common theoretical framework that can ground these practices into theory and explain why some individuals can be successful in the pursuit of personal goals within the organization whereas others are not. This article introduces a cross-disciplinary framework for a theory of personal politics (TPP). TPP contends that individuals achieve their goals within an organization because they understand how the forces of multiple actors on multiple levels of analysis shape (drive or constrain) actor interactions within varying contexts. The creation of this framework and the ongoing development of the theory are based on the theory of international politics (TIP) authored by Kenneth Waltz, an international relations (IR) theorist for nearly 60 years.

Keywords

organizational politics, political savvy, international relations theory

The ability to effectively navigate organizational politics to achieve one's goals has long been recognized as necessary for individuals to experience success within their organizations (Black, Morrison, & Gregersen, 1999; Brandon & Seldman, 2004; Christensen, 1993; Ferris et al., 2005; Gilley, 2006; Truty, 2006). Many studies have linked the effective use of political behaviors to increased individual performance (Buchanan, 1999; Colarelli Beatty & Hughes, 2005; Ferris et al.,, 2005; Morrison, 2000; Vigoda-Gadot & Kapun, 2005). As such, many HRD scholars have created

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practitioner techniques and models to guide individuals in their pursuit of personal success within an organization (Black et al., 1999; Brandon & Seldman, 2004; Christensen, 1993; DeLuca, 1999; Flagello & Dugas, 2009; Gilley, 2006; Pfeffer, 2007). Although these tools are useful, there is no common theoretical framework that can ground these practices into theory and explain why some individuals can be successful in the pursuit of personal goals within the organization whereas others are not.

The primary purpose of this article is to introduce a cross-disciplinary framework for a theory of personal politics (TPP). This theory, also introduced in this article, contends that individuals maximize their opportunities to achieve their goals within an organization because they understand how the forces of multiple actors on multiple levels of analysis shape (drive or constrain) actor political interactions. Specifically, it is the individuals' awareness of their own political capabilities and behaviors as well as those of actors on both micro and macro levels that creates a basis from which to make informed choices regarding the selection of appropriate political strategies and behaviors to achieve personal success. The TPP framework supports this theory by outlining the types of actors on various levels of analysis, their respective forces, and how these forces affect the interactions among the actors within a particular level's context. The TPP framework brings awareness and focus that allow individuals to assess the current political state for various actors whose cooperation, compliance, or nonaction may be necessary for individuals to achieve their goals. In short, the framework provides a snapshot of the political landscape surrounding different actors on different levels of analysis. Individuals are then in a better position to select political strategies, such as cooperation, or build skills, such as influencing or networking, to best advance their goals. The creation of this framework and the ongoing development of the theory are based on the theory of international politics (TIP) authored by Kenneth Waltz, an international relations (IR) theorist for nearly 60 years.

A secondary purpose of the article is to demonstrate how this framework and its assumptions can assist HRD practitioners and researchers in their quest to better understand the nature of organizational politics and the individual's role within them. The framework, with its descriptions of actor types, contexts, and forces, provides a common language that is a grounded, yet flexible frame of reference. HRD scholars can explore the root and complexity of political behaviors from a multitude of perspectives and levels of analysis. For example, the framework may allow one researcher to study an individual's political actions using motivational theories, while also encouraging another researcher to study the same question using team-based or structural theories. The contexts and combination of forces may differ, but the actors will remain the same.

This article begins by articulating the various definitions of politics as the term's usage have prompted a range of meanings that have been loosely applied across fields and throughout history. The concept of personal politics is also defined. Next, a brief discussion regarding the need for further HRD research in this area is explored. Following this section is the rationale for choosing international relations theory as the basis for the development of the TPP framework and theory. The selected theory, TIP,

will be explained in terms of its claim, assumptions, application and limitations. The TPP framework and theory will then be introduced and defined. Similar to the IR theory, the theory's claim, assumptions, perceived limitations, and proposed application will be presented. Accordingly, a brief discussion will ensue concentrating on TPP's ongoing development and testing. Finally, the conclusion includes a discussion regarding future research opportunities for TPP within HRD.

Politics Defined

Politics and its ensuing behaviors have long been recognized as standard needs and practices in society (de Vries, 2007). Aristotle referred to politics as "any form of government that explicitly takes the plurality of experiences, interests and opinions among men into account" (de Vries, 2007). Machiavelli saw politics as the way to ensure state interests—at the expense of the individual citizen if necessary (Harris, 2007). Daft (1998) maintains that politics is "the use of power to influence decisions in order to achieve desirable outcomes" (p. 442). Vigoda-Gadot and Kapun (2005) define politics as "behavior strategically designed to maximize self-interests of individuals" (p. 252). Kurchner-Hawkins and Miller (2006) state that "politics is a skill set that members of organizations need to recognize and develop in order to influence their organizations, use power in ethical ways, and achieve goals" (p. 2). From the international relations realm, Morgenthau, often considered the father of power politics defines politics as "interests defined by power" (Williams, 2004). Waltz (1979), arguably one of IR's most renowned theorists, states that "international politics can be viewed in rudimentary organizational terms" (p. 100). Even though there are different, sometimes even contradictory, definitions of politics, the concept is universally applied to all organizations: government, business, or groups of interested citizens.

For the purposes of this paper, personal politics is the conscious leveraging of one's forces and knowledge of the political landscape to achieve one's interests. It is a process. It differs from the aforementioned definitions because it focuses exclusively on an individual's interests and abilities to leverage his or her forces, such as a charismatic style (persona) or expertise (capability) to achieve success. Although the organization and groups in which the individual resides are important, the behaviors individuals engage in are driven by their personal goals.

Equalizing the Field: The Need for a Common Language in HRD

Research regarding how individual political behaviors affect and are affected by organizational politics is limited within HRD (Buchanan, 2008). In addition to the vast array of tools and tips already mentioned, the literature also reflects divergent research approaches—micro and macro—used by scholars and practitioners alike. Both groups discuss organizational politics and the individual's role using different terms and levels of analysis. Some center on the individual and his or her characteristics and

goals (micro), whereas others are structural or systemic in nature (macro). Whether one studies politics from the individual or structural perspectives, a universal language and frame of reference systematizing political actors on multiple levels, their environments, and inherent forces is lacking.

From the individual unit of analysis or micro level, scholars focus primarily on the individual's capabilities and how they can be leveraged to successfully engage in organizational politics. In their eyes, capabilities are something that can be identified and measured. They are also powered by an individual's value and belief system (Brandon & Seldman, 2004; Ferris et al, 2005; Flagello & Dugas, 2009; Manning, Pogson, & Morrison, 2008).

Likewise, there is a group of scholars who explore how an individual's perception of organizational politics influences how he or she interacts with others within a politically charged workplace (Brandon & Seldman, 2004; Buchanan, 1999; Valle & Perrewe, 2000; Vigoda-Gadot & Kapun, 2005). Included in this work is the notion that a person's orientation to work—how work is perceived—affects politics. This orientation can influence how "people at work go about getting their way with others" (Manning et al., 2008, p. 188).

From the macro-level perspective, there are a number of scholars who approach organizational politics from structural and systemic levels. These scholars ascribe to a more institutionalist perspective and assert that structures such as an organization's management hierarchy and the global sociopolitical economy drive political behaviors (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Yorks, 2004). On a smaller scale, substructures within the organization can also influence political behavior. Structures shaped by teams and intergroup behavior also have political contexts and can affect an individual's political choices (Cummings & Worley, 2005; Drory & Romm, 1990). Although the individual is a part in this approach, it is the system or structure that is the primary unit of analysis.

The intent of this article is to not suggest that one approach is better than another. Different approaches are valuable and yield different results. This article offers a framework, a new way of thinking about political actors and behaviors and their affect on the individual. A framework that outlines and identifies political actors, forces, and contexts may allow the same research question to be studied from multiple levels of analysis. The value of the proposed framework is it provides a universal language and frame of reference. It can aid HRD scholars and practitioners to better understand the complexity of political environments and how actors on multiple levels of analysis interact with one another. From a structural point of view, the researcher can assess the impact of organizational structures and contexts on individuals. From an individual point of view, the researcher can study personal political interactions using different psychological theories, such as motivation and leadership. The framework encompasses both micro- and macro-level units of analysis. It incorporates individual actors as well as organizational ones.

HRD practitioners can use the framework to assist clients to make informed decisions regarding their political strategies and actions within multiple organizations from a personal, group, organization, society, nation-state, and global level of

analysis. Specifically, practitioners will find that the understanding of the various forces—those factors that affect political relationships and interactions on multiple levels and contexts—will permit a more thorough and accurate political reading for their clients. Clients can then better identify and adopt those political behaviors that will best advance their goals.

Why Borrow From the Field of International Relations?

Because HRD is built predominantly on a collection of psychological, economic, and systems theories (Swanson & Holton, 2001), it makes sense to look to other disciplines to help explain the nature of individual interactions and how they affect organizational politics. The field of international relations was selected because it studies intra– and inter–nation-state politics and political behaviors within a large, systemic environment. To further investigate the field's appropriateness, literature regarding organizational politics and the individual's role was reviewed for both HRD and IR. Additional research from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, physics, and economics were also considered. Electronic databases searched included Business Source Premier, CIAO (Columbia International Affairs Online), JSTOR, PAIS International (Public Affairs Information Services), and PsychInfo. The key words queried and grouped included international politics, international relations theory, interdependence, motivation, organizational behavior, organizational learning, organizational politics, organizational savvy, organizational theory, performance improvement, political savvy, power, realism, and self-interest. To investigate practitioner-generated articles, key words were typed into Google and screened for scholarly references via Google Scholar. Relevant books and papers from this search were retrieved from the databases listed above.

During the review, it was discovered that the IR assumptions associated with classical and neoclassical realism could be loosely translated into the HRD perspective on organizational politics. The former insists that the system's structure shapes actor actions whereas the latter recognizes that other non–structural-level forces, such as a leader's personality and the nation-state's infrastructure, strongly influence nation-state behavior (Freyberg-Inan, 2006; Goddard & Nexon, 2005; Thayer, 2000; Wivel, 2005). These assumptions coincide with HRD theorists and practitioners who claim that the contextual norms, culture, and hierarchical authority structures affect individual and group political behavior within the organization (Buchanan, 1999; den Dekker, Jansen, & Vinkenburg, 2005; Drory & Romm, 1990; Pfeffer, 1992; Truty, 2006).

Another important neoclassical IR assumption relevant to HRD is the concept of rationality. Traditional IR classical realists adopted economics' rational choice theory stating that actors will respond the same way given the same choices, options, and conditions (Goddard & Nexon, 2005; Parsons, 2005). The neoclassicists, eventually including Waltz, recognize that this common view of rationality could not predetermine nation-state actions (Goddard & Nexon, 2005; Thayer, 2000; Wivel, 2005). This modified perspective that motivations, conditions, and perceptions affect actors differently is embraced by HRD scholars and practitioners who study organizational

politics (Certo, Connelly, & Tihanyi, 2008; Ferris et al, 2005; Fogarty & Dirsmith, 2001; Freyberg-Inan, 2006).

Further similarities can be found in the IR perspective of interdependency—that actor's actions are related to or dependent on the actions of others (Goddard & Nexon, 2005; Keohane & Nye, 1977). This concept reflects comparable relationships among individuals, groups, and organizations within HRD and other disciplines. For example, HRD systems thinking demonstrates how the parts within the whole interact within an umbrella-like environment (Cummings & Worley, 2005; Gilley & Maycunich, 2000; Swanson & Holton, 2001).

Likewise, institutional theorists within HRD and sociology hold a similar view of interconnectedness in that the institutional elements of organizations affect the goals and means of the actors internal and external to the organization (Commons, 1931; Fogarty & Dirsmith, 2001; Kuchinke, 2000; Scott, 1987). Some psychologists such as Lewin, Hmelo-Silver, and others contend that environmental factors can affect individual and group behavior (Burnes, 2004; Hmelo-Silver & Pfeffer, 2004; Swanson & Holton, 2001). Complexity theorists offer analogous views on connectivity by describing how order can be created in complex systems that are constantly changing. Because organizations have often been described as complex systems, this comparison seems viable (Burnes, 2004). Even physicists, maintaining that the universe is composed of complex systems, state that the change in one variable can change the system as a whole (Klemm, Eguiluz, Toral, & San Miguel, 2003). Because of these many similarities, it is conceivable that a theory regarding personal and organizational politics could be derived from theories and models proposed by IR theorists.

The Theory of International Politics

The theory of international politics (TIP) by Kenneth Waltz is perhaps the most well-known IR theory because it served as the basis for U.S. foreign policy for more than 30 years during the Cold War era (Ciuta, 2006). Its explanations regarding the politics concerned with nation-state security and international system stability heavily influenced U.S. policy and military decision makers. TIP highlights the behaviors nation-states need to adopt to achieve their survival. Its structural model and realist assumptions of anarchy (lack of world order), self-interest, and power can be transferred and adapted to produce the TPP framework. In particular, Waltz's model of three images or levels provides a structure from which different actors on different levels of analyses can understand different types of political behaviors.

The TIP Model

The first image focuses on the individual and decision maker and his or her role as a leader within the nation-state. The first image is important because "Without an understanding of man's nature . . . there can be no theory of politics" (Waltz, 1959, p. 28). The primary assumption associated with the first image is rationality. "Human

beings will attempt to achieve their goals and, second, that they will try to use the most efficient means to do so" (Freyberg-Inan, 2006, p. 255). By adopting the rational actor model, Waltz makes it clear that the decision makers within each nation-state are motivated by the same goal (survival) and will engage in similar behaviors, such as war or weapon stockpiling to ensure these goals (Waltz, 1959). As mentioned previously, this assumption of rationality has been later questioned by IR theorists, including Waltz.

The second image describes the nation-state and its self-interest–based goal of survival. For Waltz, the nation-state is the primary unit of analysis. It is the second image that best describes nation-states at war or peace because the state is the "container" that holds and shapes the individuals within it (Waltz, 1959). "According to the second image, the internal organization of states is the key to understanding war and peace" (Waltz, 1959, p. 81). Nation-states are encouraged to satisfy their interests first as a means of security. In an effort to maintain survival and limit conflict, nation-states stabilize the system by distributing their capabilities—power-balancing to maintain an even balance (Waltz, 1979).

Although the nation-state or second image may be the driver of international politics, it is constrained by the third image: the international system. Waltz views the international system as a structure that constrains the actions of the individual and the nation-states. This structure, "defined by the arrangement of its parts" (Waltz, 1979, p. 80), is subject to the condition of anarchy. The system is in constant flux and the nation-state needs to continually adjust to variations within the system to avoid war (Yost, 1994).

TIP's Limitations

Despite its general appeal, TIP does have its limitations. The two limitations consistently addressed are (a) the underdevelopment of the first image and (b) the role of culture and domestic politics.

A core issue with regards to the first image is the lack of recognition that organizations are social entities, driven by social beings (Wendt, 1987). "Foreign policy is made by human beings" (Wivel, 2005, p. 374). Scholars, particularly those who work across disciplines, maintain that one cannot fully understand nation-state behavior without understanding the values, motivations, and personalities of the individuals determining the behavior (Freyberg-Inan, 2006; Goddard & Nexon, 2005; Rynning & Ringsmose, 2008; Wendt, 1987; Wivel, 2005). These scholars insist that concepts from other disciplines, such as psychology, anthropology, and sociology, should also be considered.

The second major limitation is TIP's denial that culture and domestic politics play a role. Waltz (1979) recognizes that culture and domestic politics and structure *do* impact nation-state actions, but in the attempt to keep the theory parsimonious and wedded to a third image structural approach, these factors are largely ignored:

> Concern for tradition and culture, analysis of the character and personality of political actors, consideration of the conflictive and accommodative processes of politics, description of the making and execution of politics—all such matters are left aside. (p. 82)

TIP, with its many critiques, remains a powerful theory within IR (Goddard & Nexon; 2005; Rynning & Ringsmose, 2008; Sullivan, 2005; Wendt, 1987; Wivel, 2005). Its longevity, elegance, and explanations regarding international politics and political behaviors make it a viable theory from which to develop a theory of personal politics within HRD.

TPP and Its Framework

Using TIP's structural model and underlying assumptions as a foundation, a framework supporting TPP can be constructed. TPP contends that individuals achieve their goals within an organization because they understand how the forces of multiple actors on multiple levels of analysis shape (drive or constrain) actor interactions within varying contexts. Individuals engage in their version of personal politics by gauging how their own knowledge and forces can be used within these contexts to gain personal success. It is important to note that the theory does not guarantee individual success. At this point, the theory portends that individuals increase their chances to achieve their goals because the information gained from the framework deepens their understanding and strengthens their ability to adopt the best strategies needed to achieve political success.

The framework has six levels of analysis that encapsulate and describe the types of actors within TPP. The six levels include Individual, Group, Organization, Society, Nation-state, and Global. Like a wedding cake, the levels nest within one another. The actors within the distinct levels will interact with each other depending on the individual and his or her goals. See Figure 1.

The six levels are defined below.

1. *Individual:* the personal actor with identified goals and interests
2. *Group:* peers, direct reports, and supervisors within the individual's team, department, division, or a similar grouping
3. *Organization:* formal and informal organizational leaders, board members, and people of influence within suppliers, stakeholders, and competitors
4. *Society:* people involved on the local and state level to include governments, community organizations, and interest groups such as places of worship, nonprofits, and political groups.
5. *Nation-state:* actors on the nation-state level such as federal agencies, political action groups, and national groups
6. *Global:* actors on the international level to include foreign governments, international governmental organizations (IGOs), and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

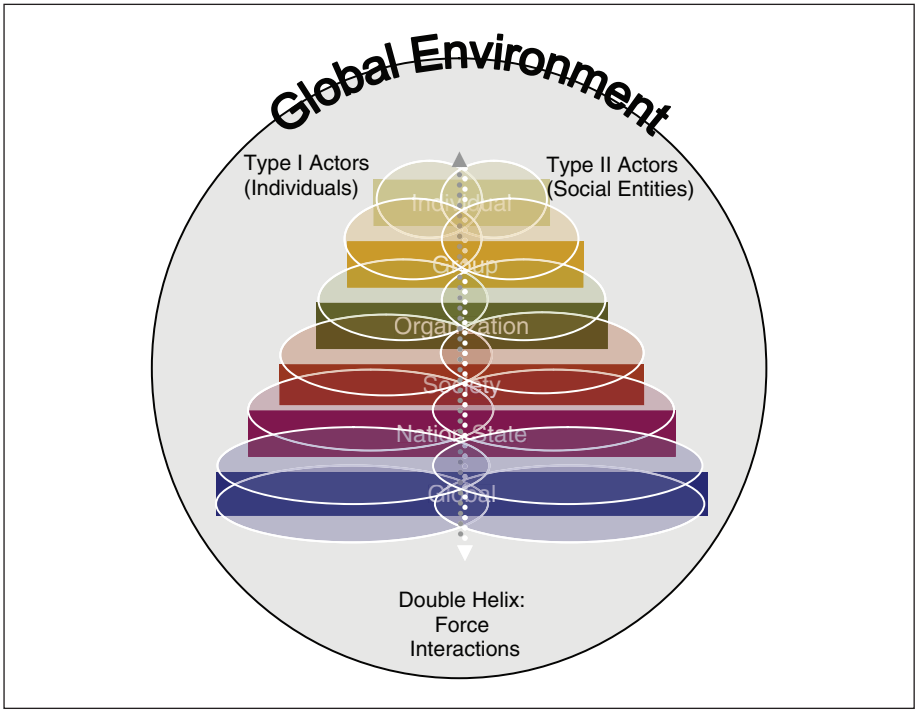

Figure 1. TPP framework
Note: TPP = theory of personal politics.

The creation of a nesting, multilevel model is purposeful but not unique. Many scholars have proposed models that capture politics' contextual nature and illustrate how difficult it is to separate political perceptions from the overall organizational environment (de Vries, 2007; den Dekker et al., 2005; Drory & Romm, 1990; Truty, 2006; Vigoda-Gadot & Kapun, 2005). De Vries's work, in particular, is especially helpful in understanding this point because he discusses how politics within an organization can be shaped by "sub politics"—politics that exist in smaller subsets of an organization. Hence, the nesting properties within the TPP model are important because they provide context for different actor interactions within and between the levels.

Within the six levels, there are two types of actors. Type I actors include people of influence who are already known to the individual and can have a positive or negative effect on the individual's goal in terms of assisting or hindering. Individuals may or may not know these actors in person; they may only be aware of their positions and the levels to which these actors belong.

Type II actors are social entities—a community of individual actors that are specific to a certain level. These actors incorporate both the level and the function encompassing the Type I actors. Type II actors, even though they are social entities or institutions,

Table 1. TPP: Examples of Type I and Type II Actors

		Key actors	
	Levels	Type I	Type II
1	Individual	Spouses, siblings, children, partners, parents, and extended family Individual friends	Family Friends
2	Group	Supervisor Peers within teams Colleagues or peers within intra- or interdepartmental or divisional groups Contacts in Type II actors	Teams Departments Intra- or interdepartmental or divisional groups Internal or external customers
3	Organization	Organizational leaders Board of directors Contacts in Type II actors	Organizational leadership Suppliers Stakeholders or shareholders Competitors
4	Society	Religious leaders Local and city officials Community leaders Political lobbyists and activists Labor union leaders Contacts in Type II actors	Local and state governments State and local political organizations Community organizations Religious leaders Places of worship
5	Nation-state	Nation-state leaders Federal agency leaders National interest group leaders National lobbyists Military leaders National government interests (NGOs) Contacts in Type II actors	National governments Armed forces National interest groups National lobbies
6	Global	Foreign government leaders International government organizations (IGOs) Regional leaders Terrorist leaders Contacts in Type II actors	Foreign governments UN and partner organizations, nonprofit and for-profit organizations EU, NATO

also influence personal goals and the individuals' pursuit of them. See Table 1 for an illustration of the actor types.

TPP Forces: Drivers and Constraints

The levels within the framework provide a structure in which the interactions—acts of political behavior—occur among the various actors. These interactions are shaped by forces that can serve as constraints or drivers for an actor. Because each level contains

different actors and political contexts, a driver for one actor may be a constraint for another. Within HRD, this concept of drivers and constraints seems reminiscent of Lewin's field theory and general systems theory. This concept can also be found in many complexity theories (Burnes, 2004; Hmelo-Silver & Pfeffer, 2004) as well as institutional theories (Kuchinke, 2000). In TPP's case, the inspiration behind this concept comes from the international relations theory of interdependence, which details how the linkage of nation-state needs drives or constrains the nation-state's behaviors (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

The forces for TPP include the following:

1. *Goals and Interests:* identified personal goals within the organization formed by individual self-interests. Individual Type I actors engage in political behaviors with other actors to achieve personal goals within the organization (Brandon & Seldman, 2004; Drory & Romm, 1990; Ferris et al., 2005; Valle & Perrewe, 2000; Vigoda-Gadot, Vinarski-Peretz, & Ben-Zion, 2003). Type II actors—social entities—also have goals and interests that may positively or negatively affect the individual's personal goals depending on how they align with each other.
2. *Persona:* values, beliefs, motivations, learning styles, personality traits of the individual, and the interacting key actors. Personality traits and motivations have been demonstrated to affect political behaviors (Manning et al., 2008; Valle & Perrewe, 2000) for Type I actors. Type II actors do not have this force as it is specific to an individual, not an entity.
3. *Capability:* technical skills, industry and organizational knowledge, and performance history. These attributes compose a Type I actor's self-efficacy where feelings of self-enhancement motivate individuals (Bandura, 1989; Hodgkinson & Healy, 2008; Pfeffer & Fong, 2005). Individuals with a proven track record will find it easier both emotionally and technically to advance or achieve other goals. Type II actors also exhibit capabilities in terms of economic wealth, market share, or external influence that can hinder or promote an individual's goals.
4. *Autonomy:* level of dependence on the system. The more independence or autonomy that Type I and Type II actors have in terms of decision making and behavior, the easier it will be for them to engage in political behaviors designed to achieve their goals. This force maintains that if Type I and Type II have the power to act without entanglements or interference from other actors, the more likely these actors will meet with political success (Drory & Romm, 1990; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1992, 2007).
5. *Governance:* rules and norms that can restrain or drive thoughts and behaviors. Type I actors can be governed by their own formal norms and rules as well as unconscious rules they have formed based on their experience in the workplace (Hodgkinson & Healy, 2008). Type I and Type II actors are governed by formal organizational rules and plans on other levels in addition to

their own (Daft, 1998; Kuchinke, 2000; Mintzberg, 1983). Nation-states, depending on the strength of their forces of capability and autonomy, have to work within the rules of the global system.

6. *Legitimacy:* well-respected reputation or image that is marked by proven performance and elevated social and political status. The status of legitimacy implies that Type I and Type II actors have a recognized right and freedom to act in a certain fashion (Reus-Smit, 2007). This force directly affects both the actors' perceptions and their abilities to achieve success within the organization (Daft, 1998; Martinelli & Waddell, 2007; Pfeffer, 1992; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2003).
7. *Culture:* tradition and customs and shared social practices that affect thoughts and behaviors. Culture is an important force and should not be ignored because it can be useful to predict Type I actors' political perceptions (Valle & Perrewe, 2000; Yost, 1994). The organizational cultures in Type II actors have long been known as a force that affects Type I actors' perceptions, beliefs, roles, and political strategies (Fogarty & Dirsmith, 2001; Koerner & Wesley, 2008).

The interaction of these forces among the other actors within and between levels increases individual awareness so that an appropriate political tool or strategy can be used. These upward and downward movements of these interactions are illustrated by the double helix in the framework model (see Figure 1). Although not depicted here, it is conceivable that the forces could interact laterally between actors on the same level. These transactions stress the framework's elastic nature; the levels and the types of forces will remain the same, but contexts will continually change because the actors are continually making new decisions and moving within the framework.

TPP Paradigm and Assumptions

TPP is not rooted in only one paradigm; it is grounded in three: (a) HRD learning paradigm, (b) HRD performance paradigm, and (c) neoclassical realist paradigm in IR. The IR paradigm illustrates the assumptions as they relate to the conditions and strategies individuals use to achieve their goals. The HRD paradigms outline TPP's assumptions as they relate to individual learning and performance improvement. The eight core assumptions include self-interest, power, bounded anarchy, sense-making, learning, systems theory, social entities, and competition.

Table 2 outlines TPP's assumptions and how they compare to TIP's assumptions. It is important to observe that some TPP assumptions such as systems theory, social entities, and competition are not clearly articulated in TIP, but they are definitely implied. Other assumptions such as bounded anarchy, sense-making, and learning are decidedly distinct, but not different enough to invalidate the use of TIP as a cross-disciplinary model.

It should also be mentioned that power is consciously treated as an assumption within this theory because it is almost always associated with politics (Pfeffer, 1992;

Table 2. Assumptions Table

Assumptions: TIP versus TPP		
Self interest	TIP	Nation-states are driven by self-interest, motivated by the need to survive. Other interests regarding individual or domestic needs become secondary (Waltz, 1979).
	TPP	Individuals are motivated to achieve personal goals within the organization (Brandon & Seldman, 2004; DeLuca, 1999; Seldman & Betof, 2004; Thayer, 2000).
Power	TIP	Power is constantly sought and used to achieve nation-state goals (Harris, 2007; Mintzberg, 1983; N. Morgenthau, 1946; Rynning & Ringsmose, 2008; Waltz, 1979). Interest is defined in terms of power (H. Morgenthau, 1965). This concept of power is measured by the quantity of guns, money, technology, and geography (Reus-Smit, 2007).
	TPP	Power is the "capacity to effect or affect organizational outcomes" (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 4). It is both a goal and a practice to achieve organizational goals (Colarelli Beatty & Hughes, 2005; Daft, 1998; Morrison, 2000; Martinelli & Waddell, 2007; Pfeffer, 1992; Valle & Perrewe, 2000). Power in politics can be formal (authority) and informal (influence) and is traditionally attributed to the key decision makers and people who can heavily influence outcomes (Daft, 1998; Mintzberg, 1983).
Systems theory	TIP	Actors interact with one another and create changes within the system, but not of the system itself (Waltz, 2000).
	TPP	Systems theory is "an organization is one element among a number of elements interacting interdependently" (Gilley & Maycunich, 2000). Systems theory can be used to study the interrelationships between the individual and an organization (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Open systems allow for changes to and within the system (Swanson & Holton, 2001).
Competition	TIP	International politics is a competitive realm. Nation-states will compete for resources and conform to norms to avoid conflict (Waltz, 1979).
	TPP	Individuals recognize they are pursuing their goals in a competitive environment where other actors are also pursuing their goals. Resources and access to power can become scarce. As competition increases, so does the need to engage in political behaviors (Boyte, 2003; Martinelli & Waddell, 2007; Miller, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008).
Social entities	TIP	Organizations are made up of social beings. However, understanding the inner workings of the nation-state is more important than understanding the individual decision maker's psychology (Waltz, 1959).
	TPP	Individuals recognize that organizations are social entities and affected by various individuals' goals, values, fears, and motivations of other actors on different levels (Wendt, 1987).
Bounded anarchy[a]	TIP	Nation-states are permitted to pursue their own interests of either survival or advancement because of the condition of complete anarchy (Waltz, 1959, 1979, 2000).

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Assumptions: TIP versus TPP		
	TPP	TPP is marked by a state of bounded anarchy—formal and informal rules and limitations that restrict the actors in the various levels (Fogarty & Dirsmith, 2001).
Sense making[b]	TIP	Decision makers use rational choice theory and make sound decisions when they study all of the options, rank the options in order of preference, and choose the option with the highest rank (Parsons, 2005).
		Decision makers are universally stable, motivated, and judged by the same motives as other human beings (Freyberg-Inan, 2006).
	TPP	Decision making cannot be divorced from perceptions, motivations, perceptions, culture, and emotions (Certo, Connelly, & Tihanyi, 2008; Fogarty & Dirsmith, 2001; Freyberg-Inan, 2006; Manning, Pogson, & Morrison, 2008).
		Individual motivations are not universal, even if the same goal is pursued (Freyberg-Inan, 2006).
Learning	TIP	Organizations learn through Darwin's evolutionary theory. Nation-states continue to exist because of their ability to adapt (Thayer, 2000).
		Learning is a by-product of a natural state of evolution.
	TPP	Learning is a core paradigm and family of theories in HRD (Swanson & Holton, 2001).
		Individuals learn to improve the performance of both themselves and the organization (Swanson & Holton, 2001).
		Organizations have memories created by routines and learn from these routines (Rice, 2008).

[a]Term used to represents decision making that is bounded by psychological and institutional norms and rules.
[b]Term used to represents decision making that includes emotions and recognition that each decision can be different.

Williams, 2004). In general, it is viewed as a means and an end—a strategy and a goal. Not surprisingly, the literature surrounding power and its use is diverse and ambivalent (Pfeffer, 1992). In efforts to provide clarity, scholars and practitioners have dissected the concept of power into types, such as legitimate, positional, enlightened, and expert, among others (Flagello & Dugas, 2009; Gilley, 2006). The acquisition of power in these categories is a goal because it connotes authority and allows individuals and nation-states to achieve their interests (Daft, 1998; N. Morgenthau, 1946; Waltz, 1979). As a strategy, or means to an end, the use of power is questioned frequently because a greater common good can be sacrificed for the interests of an individual or group (N. Morgenthau, 1946; Williams, 2004). Whether power is a "necessary evil" or is a positive energy to achieve favorable organizational change (Flagello & Dugas, 2009), power is embedded in politics. Because it underpins many of the TPP

forces, a conscious decision was made to assume that power is present and will be used in varying forms.

TPP Framework Applications Within HRD

The framework's flexibility and ability to be comprehensive in its scope of actors, contexts, and types of interactions provides a fertile ground from which HRD practitioners and scholars can explore new knowledge regarding an individual's quest to achieve personal satisfaction within political environments. As mentioned previously, both practitioners and scholars can utilize the TPP framework for different purposes.

An example from the practitioner perspective would be an executive coach assisting an employee seeking a job promotion within his own department of a successful, U.S. financial services firm. First, the individual and his coach would study the six levels and identify the key actors, for example, himself (Level 1: Individual), supervisor (Level 2: Group), organizational leaders (Level 3: Organization), other people of influence (any level), the U.S. Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) (Level 5: Nation-state) etc. that could affect his advancement. Second, the individual and his coach would analyze each of the actors within their contexts by identifying the forces driving and constraining them. These forces, such as goals and interests, personal traits (persona), capabilities, ability to make own decisions (autonomy), recognized legitimacy within the organization and current environment (culture), and a national political and economic environment supportive of organizational growth (governance and culture), can provide the individual with insights into varying actors' motivations and abilities in terms of technical skills, levels of perceived and actual power, and the nature of their cultures or contexts.

Looking at these actors within their specific contexts, the individual can focus on those actors whose actions may affect his advancement opportunities. In this case, a key actor could be the individual's supervisor, who will retire within 2 years. One of the supervisor's forces is persona—a belief and frustration that she has not been effective in her job. The individual would question how this force could affect the supervisor's past, current, and potential interactions with himself or other critical actors. Using behavioral-style assessments and motivation theories, one conclusion may be that the supervisor may not support the individual's promotion to her position because of perceived personal failings and the embarrassment of someone else succeeding where she did not.

This analysis and the conscious leveraging of knowledge and capabilities for the sake of personal gain indicate that the individual is engaging in his own personal politics. As information is gathered, the individual can best select the political tools, models, and strategies needed to advance them toward their goals. A simple example of a political strategy in this scenario may be the individual actively supporting some of his supervisor's remaining initiatives prior to her retirement. The supervisor may believe her efforts will continue after she has left, which can validate her sense of worth and achievement. Alternatively, the individual may choose to extend his

network by participating in organizational activities that increases his visibility and accomplishments to influence the perceptions of other key actors making the promotion decisions. Most likely, an individual will choose a combination of strategies because varying actor forces and contexts may suggest a multitude of complimentary interactions.

In this example, some actors may not be as important as others. The SEC may not play a critical role other than establishing a legal structure and environment that supports the firm's growth. Although it is helpful for the individual to be aware of this actor and context, he may not need to interact directly, or even consider, this actor and its forces.

As previously stated, TPP does not guarantee success, but only the optimization of success. The framework is a map for individuals to identify key actors, contexts, and driving and constraining forces that enable them to make informed choices regarding the strategies and actions needed to achieve personal goals. Although the framework is simple, the actual application is complex because of the number of potential actors involved, the differing forces at play on differing levels, and an untold combination of strategies that can ensue. A full analysis of the political landscape in any scenario requires time to identify the actors and their forces, diagnose which actors should be addressed and why, consider potential actions and their consequences, and finally, act in accordance with a subjective perspective of which tools and strategies are best suited to achieve personal goals.

An application example from the HRD researcher's perspective may be to study which theories may best explain actor behaviors from multiple levels. Using motivation and self-efficacy theories may be appropriate when studying personal interactions from Level 1, the individual level of analysis. Another scholar may also study personal interactions but choose to answer the research question from a structural level such as Level 3 or 4 (Organization or Society). Institutional or systems theories might become the theoretical approach of choice. A common language encourages the study of the same research question through different perspectives or lens. This knowledge may yield interesting results that can lead to new research developments.

Potential TPP Limitations

TPP does have limitations. The framework helps to identify key actors and their contexts and potential interactions based on their forces. However, it cannot predict how these interactions can lead to certain outcomes required for political success. At this point, the TPP framework can only assist individuals to identify and understand the forces driving and constraining interactions among different actors on different levels.

Another underdeveloped area is measurement. How does an individual know that his or her success is because of the framework's usage? Currently, the theory's success is subjective and depends on the individual's assessment. Through further development and testing, it is speculated that a link between comprehending and leveraging this framework and increased individual success will be discovered.

Similar to TIP, TPP is limited in its ability to provide adequate explanations regarding the roles of morality and the collective good. The theories' grounding in the neoclassical realist tradition directly affects these concepts. Self-interest rules supreme in this paradigm. As a result, the common perception of politics includes selfishness, greed, egoism (Seldman & Betof, 2004), and the use of Machiavellian techniques such as manipulation and the sacrifice of personal morality (Liu, 2008). In fact, neither theory denies the possibility of ethical behavior, but the presence of other competing forces may undermine these efforts (Harris, 2007; Waltz, 1979).

As a subset of morality, there is a perception that individual goals will only be self-serving and not in service of a collective good (H. Morgenthau, 1965). TPP and its assumptions do not preclude an individual seeking a goal that serves the collective. It does, however, assume that the pursuit of a collective good is only valuable when it is serving an individual's self-interest. When discussing the pursuit of a collective good in IR, Waltz (1979) allows for the emergence of such a goal, but it comes with conditions:

> States, and especially the major ones, do not act only for their own sakes. They also act for the world's common good. But the common good is defined by each of them for all of us, and the definitions conflict. (p. 205)

HRD, with its inclusion of an individual's psychology, may argue that the goal of a collective good is possible. According to social cognitivists, individuals are not completely independent and autonomous in their actions. They cooperate and share a camaraderie because these actions increase feelings of self-enhancement, a major motivator for individuals (Bandura, 1989; Derrick, 2005; Pfeffer, 1992; Pfeffer & Fong, 2005). Buchanan also points out that political behavior can be triggered by factors other than self-interest (Buchanan, 2008). More discussion regarding this assumption is needed to address factors such as motivation, power, and individual and social influence.

Morality and the collective good can occur within TIP and TPP. Yet the limitation remains that a strictly neorealist approach compromises a collective effort because it would have to be grounded in the actors' self-interests, not a collective interest (Keohane, 1998). Fortunately for TPP, the HRD learning and performance paradigms do allow, and in some case assume, that the betterment of society is a common goal for HRD professionals (Swanson & Holton, 2001).

Continued TPP Development and Testing

As TPP continues to evolve, it is worthwhile to explore and compare methods of development and evaluation. Both Waltz (IR) and Van de Ven (HRD) propose theory building and testing models that would be appropriate for TPP. Waltz used a case-study method and analyzed nation-state behavior in war and peacetime conditions over time (Waltz, 1979). Van de Ven's engaged scholarship approach encourages

scholars and practitioners to work together to build and evaluate theories by blending theoretical research and practical insight (Van de Ven, 2007). Because TPP is contextual and loaded with personal experiences and meanings, a qualitative approach emphasizing real-life experiences may be the most appropriate.

> Qualitative methods offer the best possibility for understanding how individuals both make sense of and enact their social (and organizational) worlds. . . . Tests and measurements, while useful for some purposes, do not permit us to ask how individuals and groups make sense of their worlds. (Lincoln, 2005)

A grounded theory approach may also be fitting in terms of both theory building and theory testing. The strength of this type of approach is that the type of data needed would most likely come from a sample of currently employed personnel who are dealing with organizational politics. Hence, the research would be useful to researchers and practitioners alike. As discussed in the introduction of this paper, there are many practitioners who are involved with the question of organizational politics and the tools needed to navigate them. With respect to testing the TPP framework in terms of its functionality and implementation, this approach may be the most appropriate as real cases from real people can be used as data.

If a grounded theory approach is warranted, the data collection methods would have to be carefully devised. Conducting a survey, for example, could force or generate inaccurate data as the participants may not be inclined to answer honestly about personal and sensitive issues within their organizations (Crespin, Miller, & Batteau, 2005; Hansen, 2005). Politics can clearly be considered an issue that is both personal and sensitive, especially if one is trying to navigate through it to achieve personal, self-interest–based goals.

Whatever the method selected, it is important that it emphasizes sense making. Political behaviors are tacit and frequently misunderstood by others (Rice, 2008). The observance and understanding of individual responses to the interacting forces among the six levels is complex and personal. These reactions and the reasoning behind them would be difficult to ascertain using a quantitative approach where generalizations are prized.

Future Research Directions

TPP can yield many exciting opportunities to further explore the topic of organizational politics within HRD. If the theory can be confirmed and the framework continues to provide reliable and useful information, it can provide insights into HRD topics such as employee retention, motivation, and career development. To be able to survive and flourish within a political organization may add to an employee's sense of commitment and loyalty to an organization.

TPP can also offer clues into the strength of various relationships within the different levels. Clearly, some actor relationships among the multiple levels are more important or powerful than others. Further analysis, perhaps using social network theories, may help

to characterize various relationships and their relative strengths. This type of research could offer suggestions as to which political relationships need to be fostered and why.

Another research topic would be to determine if TPP could explain the navigation of personal politics in collective societies. In particular, are the seven forces appropriate for collective societies? Do the goals of a common good or the assumption of competition change?

How cooperation occurs on individual and organizational levels is yet another research pursuit. The phrase "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine" is a common example of individuals cooperating with one another so that both interests can be forwarded. Nation-states also cooperate by joining third-image or sixth-level institutions. The value of the institution may not be the order it brings in a realist world, but rather the cooperation it generates among the participating nation-states (Keohane, 1998). It would be interesting to discover if cooperation only ensues because it satisfies an individual actor's self-interest.

Conclusion

This article has introduced a framework supporting an equally original theory of personal politics. Further refinement and testing of the framework and theory is an important next step. With continued development, it is hoped that TPP will provide a theoretical footprint to better understand the roots of political interactions among actors and how this information can assist an individual to make educated decisions about his or her political strategy selection and employment. If what Kurchner-Hawkins and Miller say is true, then the successful navigation of politics within the organization will continue to be necessary for everyone at every level (Kurchner-Hawkins & Miller, 2006). Increasing one's knowledge about the political whos, whys, and wheres can only benefit the individual and his or her achievement of personal goals within the organization.

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