

## Political Relationships Worksheet

---

*All relational systems are emotional fields. Once a field comes into existence (via a relationship), the field influences the 'elements' more than the elements themselves. The relationship influences the people more than the people themselves. A leader's presence within the system of relationships influences the system more than any technique, knowledge of method.* From Edwin Friedman.

UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICAL relationships in your organization is key to seeing how your organization works as a system. And this activity, what we call thinking politically, can help you design more effective strategies for leading adaptive change. The key assumption behind thinking politically is *that people in an organization are seeking to meet the expectations of their various constituencies*. When you understand the nature of those expectations, you can mobilize people more effectively.

Grashow, Alexander (2009-04-27). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Kindle Locations 1576-1579). Harvard Business School. Kindle Edition.

To think politically, you have to look at your organization as a web of stakeholders. For each stakeholder, you need to identify her:

- *Stake in the adaptive challenge at hand.* How will she be affected by resolution of the challenge?
- *Desired outcomes.* What would she like to see come out of a resolution of the issue?
- *Level of engagement.* How much does the person care about the issue and the organization?
- *Degree of power and influence.* What resources does the person control, and who wants those resources?

Equally important, you must identify each stakeholder's:

Values. What are the commitments and beliefs guiding the behaviors and decision-making processes?

- *Loyalties.* What obligations does the person have to people outside his or her immediate group (such as long-standing customer or supplier relationships)?
- *Losses at risk.* What does the person fear losing (status, resources, a positive self-image) if things should change?
- *Hidden alliances.* What shared interests does the person have with people from other major stakeholder groups (for example, with peers in another department) that could lead the person to form an alliance that could build influence?

Grashow, Alexander . The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: (Kindle Locations 1599-1611).

### 1. Allies

*Those INSIDE the system who—at least for the moment—are aligned with the adaptive changes that you are attempting to bring.*

“Trying to lead an adaptive set of interventions without allies is like braving Buffalo, New York, in the dead of winter without a warm coat.” (Grashow, Alexander . The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Kindle Locations 2283-2284.)

Who might be your allies?	Why might they be allies?	What’s their main objective (Support you? The initiative itself? The Organization?)	How can this ally best help you successfully implement your program/ initiative?

Note: Allies and Confidants

Allies are people who share many of your values, or at least your strategy, and operate across some organizational or factional boundary. Because they cross a boundary, they cannot always be loyal to you; they have other ties to honor. In fact, a key aspect of what makes allies extremely helpful is precisely that they do have other loyalties. That means they can help you understand competing stakes, conflicting views, and missing elements in your grasp of a situation. They can pull you by the collar to the balcony and say, “Pay attention to these other people over here. You’re not learning anything from your enemies.” Moreover, if persuasive, they can engage their people in the effort, strengthening your coalition. Sometimes however, we make the mistake of treating an ally like a confidant. Confidants have few, if any, conflicting loyalties. They usually operate outside your organization’s boundary, although occasionally someone very close in, whose interests are perfectly aligned with yours, can also play that role. You really need both allies and confidants. Confidants can do something that allies can’t do. They can provide you with a place where you can say everything that’s in your heart, everything that’s on your mind, without being predigested or well packaged. The emotions and the words can come out -, without order. Then once the whole mess is on the table, you can begin to pull the pieces back in and separate what is worthwhile from what is simply ventilation. Confidants can put you back together again at the end of the day when you feel like Humpty Dumpty, all broken to pieces. They can remind you why it’s worth getting out there and taking risks in the first place. When you ask them to listen, they are free to care about you more than they do

about your issue. (Heifetz, Ronald A.; Linsky, Marty (2002-08-09). Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading [Kindle Locations 3036-3050]. Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.)

## 2. Confidants

*Confidants are those usually OUTSIDE the system who can give you honest feedback about yourself as a leader in the system. They are those who can help you stay aware of your own “Red Zone” and your own self-care.*

Who are your confidants?	What perspective do they offer?	What do they need to fully support you?	How can this confidant

### 3. Opponents

Potential opponents are stakeholders who have markedly different perspectives from yours and who stand to risk losing the most if you and your initiative are go forward. Once you've identified the opposition, stay close to them, spend time with them, ask for their input on your initiative, listen closely to their reality (especially where it differs from yours), and take their temperature to assess how much heat you are putting on them and how desperate they are becoming. Regularly get together for coffee, include them in meetings, and let them know you value their perspective and insights on your intervention. Of course, it is not a lot of fun to spend time with "the enemy." (Grashow, Alexander. *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* [Kindle Locations 2346-2351].

Who might be your opponents?	Why might they be opponents?	What do they stand to lose if your initiative succeeds?	How might you neutralize their opposition or get them on your side?

*Note: The critical issue in lasting change is sabotage. The key capacity: Does the leader have the capacity to hang in there when reactivity is at its highest? If a leader can develop the emotional stamina to stay true to principles when reactivity and sabotage are most evident, the adaptation process reverses itself and the followers begin to adapt to the leader. (Adapted From Edwin Friedman)*

#### 4. Senior Authorities

Who are the senior authorities most important to your program/ initiative's success?	Why are they important?	What signals are they giving about how the organization perceives your program/ initiative?	What might you say or do to secure their support as your initiative is being implemented?

*Note: If you are a middle manager, be differentiated, have convictions and bring calm. Take responsibility for communicating and caring for those below you, and keep relationships with those above you. It's harder for someone to sabotage you who is in a relationship with you. Don't push superiors to take stands, instead pass the system anxiety and challenges on to them. Don't shelter them from anxiety in the system and stay connected to them as they work through THEIR challenges. In this way, you build healthy alliances with your superiors for them to stay with you in your challenges. (Adapted from Edwin Friedman*

## 5. Casualties

Resisters to your initiative are people who feel most threatened by it. They may believe that they will not be able to make the changes you recommend, that they might lose their job, or that they'll be worse off in some way if the initiative is carried out. You may agree or disagree with their perception, but it is their perception that counts for your purposes. Resist any temptation to try "straightening them out." Our experience suggests this would be a fool's errand and could actually set you back by stiffening their resistance. (Nobody likes being told that they "shouldn't feel that way.") Instead, accept that what you're trying to do is not in their interest. Compassion and empathy have their own reward in heaven, but they are also critical tools for comprehending the potential losses at stake for your opposition.

Grashow, Alexander (2009-04-27). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Kindle Locations 2355-2361). Harvard Business School. Kindle Edition.

Who will be casualties of your program/initiative?	What will they lose?	What new skills would help them survive the change and thrive in the new organization?	How might you help them acquire those skills?	Which casualties will need to leave the organization?	How could you help them succeed elsewhere?

*Note: "Stay calm, stay connected, stay the course." Keep relationship, but "don't become the anxiety sink for the system." (Friedman)*

## 6. Dissenters

Who are the dissenters in your organization –those who typically voice radical ideas or mention the unmentionable?	What ideas are they bringing forth that might be valuable for your program/initiative?	How might you enable their ideas to have a hearing?	How can you protect them from being marginalized or silenced?
