

# Office politics the biggest contributor to workplace stress

The rise in office politics is the single biggest concern for managers in the 21st century, a survey of management trends has shown.

A study spotting changes over the past decade has identified colleagues working against each other to progress their careers as the major source of stress in the workplace, compared to 10 years ago when workload was the number one worry for staff.



Almost two thirds (60%) of the 490 managers interviewed for the study reported an increase in 'political behaviour' in their organisation in recent years, with people becoming more self-promoting, networking in the office and making sure they are recognised by the people that have power. The findings are published in The Management Agenda 2007 report, published by Roffey Park, an executive education and research organisation.



Conflict in the workplace has increased in recent years, with 44% of people stating that organisational politics was the main cause of the growing discord. Valerie Garrow, principal researcher at Roffey Park said that companies were becoming less hierarchical with flatter, more democratic structures. 'The demise of the traditional career ladder now means that a good deal of influencing and networking is required,' said Ms Garrow.

Looking ahead over the next 10 years, Ms Garrow anticipated that companies would increasingly invest in their people and added: 'Organisations will seek out more enlightened working practices that engage and motivate their people.'

The Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR), an independent organisation which advises on mediation and dispute prevention, said the trend was understandable. Graham Massie, a mediator and director of CEDR said: 'There is more office politics because structures are flatter. Nowadays you are not told what to do in quite the explicit way that used to be the case. There is more flexibility.'

'Conflict is an unfortunate fact of the workplace and in situations where people have more flexible roles, there are more opportunities for misunderstandings and for things to go wrong.'

Chris Malpass, Director of The Pathways Group, is not surprised by the findings. 'This confirms what we've known for some time, that internal politics is the way that many organisations get things done, even if they won't admit it' says Chris. 'Unfortunately, few firms will acknowledge how damaging it can be and do something practical to make the situation better'.



the pathways group

The Pathways Group is one of few learning and development consultants who have a specific training programme for Organisational Politics. Their one-day workshop gives clarity on exactly what politics is, identifies strategies to manage it and helps delegates develop a positive action plan for their workplace. 'Many people's experience of office politics is a negative one' says Chris. 'We help them turn that around and show them that it can be very positive if handled properly.'

More details of the *Positive Organisational Politics* programme can be found at [www.pathwaysgroup.co.uk](http://www.pathwaysgroup.co.uk)