Abstract

This article defines power, focuses on sources and types of power, how leaders can increase their power, and how effective leaders use power without hurting the organization and its members. Leaders who work to increase their personal power, persuasiveness, and expertise will enhance their effectiveness. If they exercise authority over others with sensitivity, avoid dominating or threatening them, and rely on their expertise and personality to influence them, leaders can enhance their effectiveness. Effective leaders do not display the characteristics associated with an abrasive personality which would cause them to under-utilize the talents of employees. Effective leaders increase their personal power by empowering others in the organization.

Power Defined

Relative to organizations, Cangemi (1992) asserted: "Power is the individual’s capacity to move others, to entice others, to persuade and encourage others to attain specific goals or to engage in specific behavior; it
is the capacity to influence and motivate others” (p. 499) Krausz (1986) argued "Power is the ability to influence the actions of others, individuals or groups. It is understood as the leader’s influence potential” (p. 69). Verderber and Verderber (1992) argued, "Social power is a potential for changing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of others” (p. 280). Weber (1954) defined power as "the possibility of imposing one’s will upon the behavior of others," while Etzioni (1978) wrote, "Power is an actor’s ability to induce or influence another actor to carry out his directives or any other norms he supports." Those in power have the ability and capacity to get others to do what they want them to do. Folger, Poole, and Stutman (1993) defined power as "the capacity to act effectively” (p. 69).

These definitions of power focus on the successful way leaders influence their followers to produce an effect. Cangemi (1992) believed successful leaders move and influence people through their power toward greater accomplishments for themselves and their organizations. Tannenbaum (1962) believed effective leaders have the ability, through interpersonal influence, to cause their subordinates to attain specific personal, as well as organizational goals. Hersey and Blanchard (1982) suggested effective leadership acts as the process of influencing the activities of an individual or group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation.

Sources and Types of Power

The currency of leadership, essential to influencing others, involves a wide variety of factors. Varying authors (Baldridge, 1971; French & Raven, 1959; Hackman & Johnson, 1991; Kanter, 1977; King, 1987) described sources, types, and uses of power essential to effective leadership. Eight primary sources of power include: support systems, information, credibility, visibility, legitimacy, persuasiveness, charisma, and agenda setting. Support systems include both formal and informal opportunities for networking. Information, the second source of power, involves not what one knows, but how fast one finds out, which encourages power players to be good listeners. Power flows to those who have the information and knowledge to accomplish organizational tasks. The third power source, credibility, resides in how much respect one attains. We rely on highly credible people who have established a history of experience and expertise. The fourth source of power, visibility, means taking on tough jobs so people take notice. Legitimacy, the fifth source of power, works in concert with visibility and involves having respected power players commend one publicly, thereby creating acceptance among any would be doubters. The sixth source of power, persuasiveness, determines how successfully a person uses rational or emotional appeals. One’s ability to persuade depends on personality, content of a task, motivation, and confidence. The seventh source of power, charisma, incorporates many other ethical qualities of leadership together. Charisma includes a leader’s reputation, sincerity, trustworthiness, expertise, and dynamism. Describing this artistic proof of leadership by saying it involves a leader’s aura, the emanations of his or her spirit, the amount of "psychic space" taken up, helps explain it. The last source of power, agenda setting, rests in knowing when meetings will be held and accessing the group leader to put items on the agenda at just the right time. Two by-products of networks and alliances involve access to decision-making arenas and the ability to influence the agendas in those arenas. People or groups who have access to agenda setting frequently represent their positions, while the interests and concerns of those not present may become distorted or ignored (Brown, 1986; Lukes, 1974).

While operating in a system, knowing how to identify power makes it easier to access the type which works best. The five most commonly known types of power include: coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent (French & Raven, 1959). Coercive power bases its effectiveness on the ability to administer punishment or give negative reinforcements. The second type, reward power, rests on the ability to deliver something valued by the receiver. People who can deliver money, jobs, or political support have something other people want, and therefore become extremely powerful in organizations. Legitimate power, the third type, resides in a person’s position rather than the actual person himself or herself. This type of formal power relies on position in an authority hierarchy. Occasionally, people with legitimate power fail to recognize they have it, and then they may begin to notice others going around them to accomplish their goals. The fourth type, expert power, relies on a person’s special knowledge and expertise in a given area. Anyone can have it if he or she formally and informally prepares sufficiently. The last type, referent power, includes admiration of a leader, which usually produces influence and acceptance by subordinates (French
& Raven, 1959). Referent power acts a little like role model power. It depends on respecting, liking, and holding another individual in high esteem. It usually develops over a long period of time.

Among these five sources of power, creating a positive operating climate involves choosing the most appropriate compliance-gaining tactics, which tend to lead to greater "life" or job satisfaction (Plax, Kearney, & Downs, 1986). McCroskey, Richmond, Plax, and Kearney (1985) claimed relying on expert, reward and referent power appeared to produce the greatest satisfaction, while reliance on coercive and legitimate power had the opposite effect. Rahim (1989) found legitimate power useful in gaining compliance, but satisfaction from supervisees decreased. Expert and referent power bases correlated with both compliance and satisfaction. Rahim (1989) also noted effective leaders can "enhance their referent power base if they learn to be considerate of their subordinates' needs and feelings, treat them fairly, and defend their interests when acting as their representative" (p. 555). Effective leaders combine the various bases and sources of power, electing to use them in appropriate situations. An effective leader rarely depends on only one source or base of power.

**Effective Leaders Become More Powerful**

To increase organizational power, effective leaders recognize the importance of developing their own personal power. Kotter (1977) asserted the importance of planning, organizing, budgeting, staffing, controlling, and evaluating the people on whom the leader depends. Trying to control others solely by directing them on the basis of authority associated with one’s position rarely works. Effective leaders often become dependent upon individuals over whom they have no formal authority. Also, in this modern age, few employees passively accept and obey authorities who issue a constant stream of commands simply because they play the role of boss.

To increase one’s organizational power in another way, a person can exhibit an attitude of trust in other organizational members. At the same time, developing a high degree of expertise within the organization increases a leader’s personal power. Subordinates gain respect for leaders when expertise increases and subordinates develop an attitude of trust toward the leader. Increasing one’s own achievements and making them known establishes a higher organizational standard which subordinates can look up to and respect. As respect increases among the subordinates through a track record of accomplishments, the leader’s personal power increases in the organization (Kotter, 1977). Failure of the leader to recognize the need for the development and the importance of personal power will most likely increase subordinates’ resistance to change or direction.

**Effective Leaders Use Power**

Leaders who use power effectively accomplish tasks in the organization without relying on their job title. Kanter (1977) suggested powerful leaders rely more on personal power than job title, or credentials, to mobilize their resources, inspire creativity, and instill confidence among subordinates. Block (1987) said leaders become more powerful as they nurture the power of others. Jamieson and O’Mara (1991) argued: "As a manager who empowers others, you will act as a colleague more than a boss, relying on influence, respect, and relationships to work with employees" (p. 163). Empowering managers seek to share power, to give it away, then hold, those to whom they gave it very accountable (Stewart, 1997). They recognize and reward people for their accomplishments, contributions, and ideas. They encourage participation, solicit input, and involve people in decisions, giving credit to those who have earned it. They reward people who generate the greatest impact toward organizational goals, rewarding results rather than processes.

Powerful leaders influence followers to do what they want done. Galbraith (1983) said a powerful leader will be judged by how effectively he or she persuaded his or her subordinates to accept solutions to problems that led to organizational goals. Winning acceptance of one’s views produces an incredibly rewarding feeling of accomplishment. Competence in the political arena involves keen awareness of power, skill at using the sources and bases of power effectively, using technical skills with proficiency, using information properly, forming effective alliances within the organization, and exercising authority over
others with sensitivity to their feelings (Mintzberg, 1983). What matters most in the effective use of power at the top is accessibility, networking, listening, and people skills (Stewart, 1997). Previously, at Owens-Corning, the 28th floor became stigmatized as "management." Today leadership operates in the middle of the second floor, accessible to everyone (Stewart, 1997).

Leaders who use power effectively care about people and avoid dominating them. They depend on deftness, rather than flexing their muscle. They choose respect over friendship, and want truth rather than deception. McClelland (1970) claimed the positive or socialized face of power emphasizes a concern for group goals, finds the goals which move people, helps the group formulate them, takes the initiative in providing members of the group the means to achieve them, and gives group members a sense of support, strength, and competence needed to work hard toward achieving them. McMurry (1973) claimed leaders who can persuade become capable of influencing their audiences both emotionally and rationally. They analyze their audience in terms of relevant needs, desires, and values after which they focus on a connection with their audience on common ground before moving into areas of resistance. Areas of resistance must be handled carefully, respectfully, and in a non-dogmatic way. Payne (1996) reminded leaders of the importance not only of what they say, but how they say it. People who speak with a variety of pitch, volume, and timing changes, with well organized messages, clear and well developed points, with both logical and emotional appeals, using the Standard Dialect, receive higher ratings of credibility and are perceived as more powerful, competent, and persuasive in most situations (Payne, 1996). Bolman and Deal (1991) said individuals who possess such qualities as charisma, political skill, verbal ability, and competence to communicate their vision become powerful by virtue of these personal attributes. Yukl and Falbe (1991) suggested persuasiveness acts as the most important skill associated with leadership’s effectiveness.

The unethical use of power may help a leader achieve a short-term effect, but over the long run this behavior will cause the leader to become a detriment to the organization and force the organization to move against him or her. For example, in one organization a leader changed scrap records in order to impress higher level authorities. This unethical behavior eventually caught up to this a leader, as other unethical acts followed and the company replaced him. In another large American organization, a leader found guilty of altering the content of fruit juice paid dearly for this unethical conduct. Levinson (1978) claimed the leader with an abrasive personality, often of high intelligence, acts as a perfectionist—pushing hard toward accomplishments, consistently producing a superior job but not working well with others, usually fails to motivate subordinates. These type leaders often fail to live up to their potential, rarely rise very high in organizations, and have trouble delegating or empowering others (Levinson, 1978). While difficult to do, if top leaders would only point out the destructive tendencies of abrasive behavior and teach their subordinate leaders that such behaviors will not be tolerated, improvement might occur.

Conclusion

In summary, the literature on power reveals how leaders gain and use power in ethical ways within the context of organization. Leaders who work to increase their personal power, persuasiveness, and expertise will enhance their effectiveness. If leaders exercise authority over others with sensitivity, avoid dominating or threatening them, and rely on their expertise and personality to influence them, they can enhance their effectiveness. Effective leaders do not engage in unethical conduct nor display the characteristics associated with an abrasive personality, which would cause them to under-utilize the talents of their employees. Effective leaders increase their personal power by empowering others in the organization.

References


