

Power and Politics in Organizations

GSBA 539, Fall 2007

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Office Hours: T/Th 9:30 am -12:00 noon or by appointment

W 7:00 pm – 9:40 pm, OH 328

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Course Description

This course covers the analysis, explanation and evaluation of power and politics in organizations. It offers frameworks for assessing the sources of power in organizations, the conditions that lead to its attainment and its effective use from both a practical and an ethical perspective. Our discussions will cover how people in organizations try to get what they want by influencing others, how their ability to do so is affected by power distributions and how people try to change power distributions in their favor. We will evaluate these behaviors and discuss how (if at all) we should participate in these behaviors.

Course Objectives

When you successfully complete this course, you should be able to:

- recognize situations that involve the use of power,
- identify the principle actors and their points of view,
- understand specific strategies and tactics through which power and influence are used,
- understand the positive and negative consequences associated with the use of power and politics in organizations, and
- outline a personal learning agenda for how to harness power and influence in order to develop and achieve your career goals

Reading Materials:

Books

- Machiavelli (1532) The Prince
- Cialdini (1993) Influence: Science and practice
- Pfeffer (1992) Managing with Power

Articles

- French and Raven (1959) The basis of social power
- Kipnis (1984) The view from the top
- Zimbardo and Ruch (1975) Psychology and Life

Evaluation: Course grading will be based upon the following activities:

Class Participation (20%)

Much of the value of the course follows from exposure to the ideas and insights of others both in readings and in class discussion. For this reason, substantial weight is placed on the importance of class participation. It is essential that you come to class prepared to share your own ideas and insights about the readings and the subject under discussion.

Influence Tactics – Personal Experience Write-Up (20%)

Each of us experiences a multitude of influence attempts throughout our daily lives. These attempts may be as simple as attempting to influence our purchasing patterns or as complex as attempting to influence our moral beliefs. The purpose of this write-up is to have you reflect on a particular influence attempt that has happened to you recently and critically analyze both the influence attempt and your response to the influence attempt. The write-up should be a maximum of two pages and should demonstrate a clear understanding of the influence mechanisms employed.

Power in Action – Personal Experience/Movie Write-Up (20%)

The purpose of this analysis is to have you critically analyze the power and influence activities occurring within a particular setting. You may choose to analyze a past work environment (preferred). Alternatively, you may choose to rent, watch, and analyze a feature-length film as a case study in power and influence. The write-up should be a maximum of two pages and should demonstrate a clear understanding of the uses of power and influence demonstrated in the chosen setting. Possible films to choose from for the analysis include: American Dream (1990), Barbarians at the Gate (1993), Six Degrees of Separation (1993), The War Room (1993), City Hall (1996), Primary Colors (1998), Bulworth (1998), The Talented Mr. Ripley (1999). Other films may be used for the analysis with the prior approval of the instructor.

Case Study Write-Up (20%)

During the semester, we will be watching episodes from the first year of “The Apprentice” as a case study in power and politics. Each of you will be assigned a character to follow. During the showing of each episode, make notes of what your character did ‘right’ and what your character did ‘wrong’ from a power and politics perspective. We will use this information as part of the class discussion. In addition, you will turn in at the end of the class a write-up summarizing your observations. The write-up should be a maximum of two pages and should demonstrate your ability to analyze the uses and misuses of power and politics in organizations.

Ethical Implications– Personal Opinions Write-up (20%)

A variety of ethical issues emerge concerning the appropriate use of power and influence tactics. The purpose of this write-up is to have you reflect on what you believe to be the appropriate uses of power and influence. The attempt here is not to prescribe a particular ethic. Instead, students are asked to develop their own opinions concerning the appropriate use of power and influence. The write-up should be a maximum of two pages and should demonstrate a clear understanding of the potential dark side of power.

1. 9/5 Session 1 - What is Power? – Your Perceptions
French and Raven (1959)
“*The Apprentice*” – Episode Two
2. 9/12 Session 2 - What is Power?
Machiavelli (1532)
“*The Apprentice*” – Episode Three
3. 9/19 Session 3 - Influence Tactics
Cialdini (1993) – Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4
“*The Apprentice*” – Episode Four
4. 9/26 Session 4 - Influence Tactics
Cialdini (1993) – Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8
“*Influence*” – Cialdini Video
5. 10/3 Influence Tactics in Action
Guest Speaker/“*Toxic Sludge*” Video
Influence Tactics – Personal Experience Write-Up
6. 10/10 Session 7 - Sources of Power
Pfeffer (1992) Part I, Ch. 1, 2, and 3
“*The Apprentice*” – Episode Six
7. 10/17 Session 8 - Sources of Power
Pfeffer (1992) Part II, Ch. 4, 5, and 6
“*The Apprentice*” – Episode Seven
8. 10/24 Session 9 - Sources of Power
Pfeffer (1992) Part II, Ch. 7, 8, and 9
“*The Apprentice*” – Episode Eight
9. 10/31 Session 10 - Uses of power
Pfeffer (1992) Part III, Ch. 10, 11, and 12
“*The Apprentice*” – Episode Ten
10. 11/7 Session 11 - Uses of power
Pfeffer (1992) Part III, Ch. 13, 14, and 15
Power in Action – Personal Experience/Movie Write-Up
11. 11/14 Pfeffer “*Managing with Power*” Video
12. 11/28 Session 12 - Power dynamics
Pfeffer (1992) Part IV, Ch. 16, 17, and 18
“*The Apprentice*” – Episodes Eleven
13. 12/5 Session 13 - Power: The Dark Side
Kipnis (1984) *The view from the top*
Zimbardo and Ruch (1975) *Psychology and Life* (9th ed. pages 558-561)
14. 12/12 Session 14 - Power: Final Thoughts
Ethical Implications – Personal Opinions Write-Up
The Apprentice – Case Study Write-Up

BASES AND SOURCES OF POWER

by WILF H. RATZBURG (<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/1650/htmlpower.html>)

A model, proposed by **French and Raven**, identified five ways in which power may be exerted.

- **REFERENT POWER**

- **Referent power** is based on group **members' identification** with, **attraction** to, or **respect** for, the powerholder. As with reference groups, group members gain a **sense of intrinsic personal satisfaction from identification** with the referent powerholder. **Charismatic leaders** generally possess both legitimate and referent power. If Julio looks up to or admires Chris, he may follow him because of Chris' personal qualities, characteristics, or reputation. Chris uses referent power (also known as charismatic power) to influence Julio. *Advertising that uses celebrities is an example of the use of referent power. A junior manager may assume an unnecessarily subservient role because of admiration of a senior manager.*

- **EXPERT POWER**

- **Expert power** derives from group members' assumption that the powerholder possesses **superior skills and abilities**. Lucy has power over James because of her expertise (relative to his) in an area critical to their team's success. *Presumably, the business mathematics instructor at BCIT has power over his students due his expertise in that subject matter.* Frequently, expert power may be exercised in a rather narrow domain.

- **LEGITIMATE POWER**

- **Legitimate power** stems from an authority's legitimate right to require and demand compliance. Legitimate power exists when Edgar complies with the policeman's request that he take a breathalyzer test. Edgar agrees that the police have the right -- they have been **granted authority** -- to curtail his drunken behavior. Legitimate power depends on the official position held by the person exercising it. Legitimate power may be derived from three sources:
 - **prevailing cultural values** can assign legitimate power to some individuals (elders, for example)
 - **accepted social structure** may grant legitimate power to some people (for example, royalty)
 - being **promoted** into a given position may confer legitimate power

It has been argued that the downfall of the Shah of Iran came about because the Iranian people came to question and denounce his right to legitimate power.

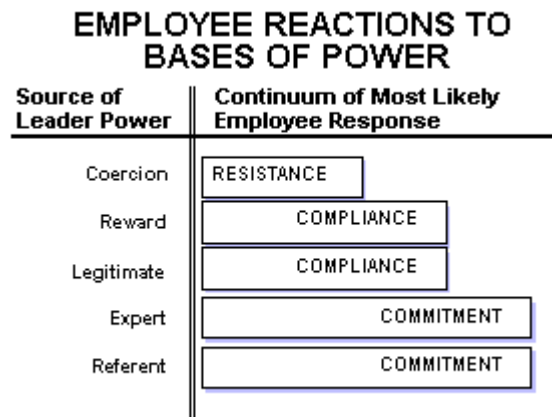
- **REWARD POWER**

- A professor has reward power over his students; he can assign grades and determine whether or not a student acquires the requisite credits to move on in the program. *Students will work well into the night to finish assignments because of the professor's reward power.* Rewards (reward power) have been shown to be effective when employees see a direct connection between performance and reward (**Expectancy Theory of Motivation**). However, in most work environments, managers have limited control over the nature of the rewards granted employees.

- **COERCIVE POWER**

- **Coercive power** is the **capacity to dispense punishments** to those who do not comply with requests or demands. According to Kipnis: "**Individuals exercise coercive power through a reliance upon physical strength, verbal facility, or the ability to grant or withhold emotional support from others. These bases provide the individual with the means to physically harm, bully, humiliate, or deny love to others.**" Examples of coercive power in organizations include the ability (implied or real) to fire, demote, transfer to undesirable positions or strip subordinates of preferred perquisites.
 - **Coercive methods** have also been linked to a number of **dysfunctional group processes**, including (1) **dislike** and rejection, (2) **anger** and reciprocal **conflict**, (3) revolutionary **coalitions**, (4) **reactance**, (5) reductions in intrinsic motivation, and (6) self-blame.

The figure below indicates some probable employee reactions to the use of different types of employer power.



From ChangingMinds.org (accessed September 6, 2005)

The most common description of power is French and Raven (1960). This divides power into five different forms.

Coercive power

This is the power to force someone to do something against their will. It is often physical although other threats may be used. It is the power of dictators, despots and bullies. Coercion can result in physical harm, although its principal goal is compliance. Demonstrations of harm are often used to illustrate what will happen if compliance is not gained.

Coercion is also the ultimate power of all governments. Although it is often seen as negative, it is also used to keep the peace. Parents coerce young children who know no better. A person holds back their friend who is about to step out in front of a car.

Other forms of power can also be used in coercive ways, such as when a reward or expertise is withheld or referent power is used to threaten social exclusion.

Reward power

One of the main reasons we work is for the money we need to conduct our lives. There are many more forms of reward -- in fact anything we find desirable can be a reward, from a million dollar yacht to a pat on the back.

Reward power is thus the ability to give other people what they want, and hence ask them to do things for you in exchange.

Rewards can also be used to punish, such as when they are withheld. The promise is essentially the same: do this and you will get that.

Legitimate power

Legitimate power is that which is invested in a role. Kings, policemen and managers all have legitimate power. The legitimacy may come from a higher power, often one with coercive power. Legitimate power can often thus be the acceptable face of raw power.

A common trap that people in such roles can fall into is to forget that people are obeying the position, not them. When they either fall from power or move onto other things, it can be a puzzling surprise that people who used to fawn at your feet no longer do so.

Referent power

This is the power from another person liking you or wanting to be like you. It is the power of charisma and fame and is wielded by all celebrities (by definition) as well as more local social leaders. In wanting to be like these people, we stand near them, hoping some of the charisma will rub off onto us.

Those with referent power can also use it for coercion. One of the things we fear most is social exclusion, and all it takes is a word from a social leader for us to be shunned by others in the group.

Expert power

When I have knowledge and skill that someone else requires, then I have Expert power. This is a very common form of power and is the basis for a very large proportion of human collaboration, including most companies where the principle of specialization allows large and complex enterprises to be undertaken.

Expert power is that which is used by Trades Unions when they encourage their members to strike for better pay or working conditions. It is also the power of the specialist R&D Engineer when they threaten to leave unless they get an exorbitant pay rise or a seat by the window.

So what?

So use these categories as a checklist to determine what forms of power you and others have available. It is a common negotiating mistake to assume you are powerless or have less power than the other person.