

**UG Psychology**

**Semester- 5**

**Paper- Organizational Behavior (CC12)**

**Course code- BPSYCCHC502**

**Unit- 3- Dynamics of Organizational Behavior**

**Power and Politics**

**Concept of power:**

The study of power and its effects is important to understand how organizations operate. Every interaction and every social relationship in an organization involves an exercise of power. How organizational subunits and individuals are controlled is related to the issue of power.

In an organizational setting, **power** is simply the ability to get others to do what one wants them to do. **Power** is a person's ability to get something done the way he wants it done. Power lets a person affect other people's behavior, get people to do what they otherwise might not do.

Power involves a relationship between two or more people. **Robert Dahl**, a political scientist, captures this important relational focus when he defines power as **"A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something B would not otherwise do."** A person or group cannot have power in isolation; power has to be exercised or have the potential for being exercised in relation to some other person or group.

Power has been defined in many ways. **Kotter** seems to capture the spirit of most definitions when he defined power as **"a measure of a person's potential to get others to do what he or she wants them to do, as well as to avoid being forced to do what he or she does not want to do."** It is the capacity to affect people, things, situations, and decisions.

The terms **power and influence** are frequently used interchangeably in the management literature; however, there is a subtle, yet important, difference between them. **Influence** is a transaction in which person B is induced by person A to behave in a certain way. For example, if an employee works overtime at the boss's request, that employee has been influenced by the boss.

**Power** represents the capability to get someone to do something; influence is the exercise of that capability. Another way of stating the distinction is to say that power is the potential to influence, while influence is power in action. Thus you may have power (the capacity to influence) but not use it; on the other hand, you cannot influence anyone (induce certain behavior in another person) without power.

## **BASES OF POWER**

Where does power come from? What is it that gives an individual or a group influence over others? The answer to these questions was developed by social scientists John French and Bertrand Raven, who first presented a five-category classification scheme of sources or bases of power: coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent. They subsequently added **information power** to that schema

### **Formal Power**

Formal power is based on an individual's position in an organization. It can come from the ability to coerce or reward, or from formal authority.

**Coercive Power:** Coercive power is defined by French and Raven as being dependent on fear. Coercive power exists when someone has the ability to punish or physically or psychologically harm another person. The ability to make threats of punishment and deliver actual punishment gives an individual coercive power. For example, some managers berate subordinates in front of their peers and colleagues, belittling their efforts and generally making their work lives miserable. One reacts to this power base out of fear of the negative results that might occur if one fails to comply. It rests on the application, or the threat of the application, of physical sanctions such as the infliction of pain, the generation of frustration through restriction of movement, or the controlling by force of basic physiological or safety needs.

**Reward Power:** The opposite of coercive power is **reward power**, with which people comply because it produces positive benefits; someone who can distribute rewards, others view as valuable will have power over them. These rewards can be either financial—such as controlling pay rates, raises, and bonuses—or nonfinancial, including recognition, promotions, interesting work assignments, friendly colleagues, and preferred work shifts or sales territories. Individuals or organizations have reward power **if they can obtain compliance by promising or granting rewards.**

**Legitimate Power:** Legitimate power refers to a person's ability to influence others because of the position within the organization that person holds. Legitimate or position power, as it is sometimes called, is derived from the position itself. That is, the organization has given to an individual occupying a particular position the right to influence—command—certain other individuals. This formal power is what we call authority. Orders from a manager in an authority position are followed because the manager has the legitimate power to command certain subordinates in lower positions. For their part, subordinates believe they ought to comply with the orders. Not following orders subjects the offender to disciplinary action, just as not following society's legal directives subjects one to disciplinary action in the form of arrest and penalty.

### **Personal Power**

Many of the most competent and productive chip designers at organizations have power, but they aren't managers and have no formal power. What they have is **personal power**, which comes from an individual's unique characteristics. There are two bases of personal power: expertise and the respect and admiration of others.

**Expert Power:** A person has **expert power** when he or she possesses special expertise that is highly valued. Experts have power even when their formal position in the organizational hierarchy is low. A person may possess expertise on technical, administrative, or personal matters. The salesperson who has a knack for landing new accounts, the IT support person who always solves computer problems for employees, the college dean who consistently raises the most money—all have enhanced ability to influence others because of their special expertise. The more difficult it is to replace the expert, the greater degree of expert power he or she possesses.

**Expert power is influence wielded as a result of expertise, special skill, or knowledge.** As jobs become more specialized, we become increasingly dependent on experts to achieve goals. It is generally acknowledged that physicians have expertise and hence expert power: Most of us follow our doctor's advice. Computer specialists, tax accountants, economists, industrial psychologists, and other specialists wield power as a result of their expertise.

**Referent Power:** Many individuals identify with and are influenced by a person because of the latter's personality or behavioral style. The charisma of the person is the basis of **referent power.** A person with charisma is admired because of her personality, vision, and the means she uses to speak from her heart. The strength of a person's charisma is an indication of her referent power. **Charisma** is a term often used to describe the magnetic personalities of some politicians, entertainers, or sports figures. Some managers are also regarded by their subordinates as charismatic.

**Referent power develops out of admiration of another and a desire to be like that person.** In a sense, then, it is a lot like charisma. If you admire someone to the point of modeling your behavior and attitudes after him or her, that person possesses referent power over you. Sometimes teachers and coaches have referent power because of our admiration of them. Referent power explains why celebrities are paid millions of dollars to endorse products in commercials.

**Information Power:** Information power comes from access to and control over information. People in an organization who have data or knowledge that others need can make those others dependent on them. Managers, for instance, because of their access to privileged sales, cost, salary, profit, and similar data, can use this information to control and shape subordinates' behavior. Similarly, departments that possess information that is critical to a company's performance in times of high uncertainty—for example, the legal department when a firm faces a major lawsuit or the human resource department during critical labor negotiations—will gain increased power in their organizations until those uncertainties are resolved.

## **DEPENDENCY: THE KEY TO POWER**

The most important aspect of power is that it is a **function of dependence**. In this section, we will see how understanding dependence helps us understand power itself.

### **The General Dependence Postulate**

Let's begin with a general postulate: *The greater B's dependency on A, the greater the power A has over B.* When you possess anything that others require but that you alone control, you make them dependent upon you and therefore you gain power over them. Another way to frame dependency is to think about a relationship in terms of "who needs whom?" The person who has the most need is the one most dependent on the relationship. *Dependency is inversely proportional to the alternative sources of supply.* If something is plentiful, possession of it will not increase your power. If everyone is intelligent, intelligence gives no special advantage. Similarly, in the circles of the super-rich, money does not result in power. But if you can create a monopoly by controlling information, prestige, or anything that others crave, they become dependent on you. Alternatively, the more options you have the less power you place in the hands of others. This explains, for example, why most organizations develop multiple suppliers rather than give their business to only one.

### **What Creates Dependency?**

Dependency is increased when the resource you control is **important, scarce, and cannot be substituted.**

#### **Importance**

if nobody wants what you have, there is no dependency. To create dependency, the thing(s) you control must be perceived as important. In some organizations, people who control the budget have a great deal of importance. In other organizations, those who possess the knowledge to keep technology working smoothly are viewed as important. What is important is situational. It varies among organizations and undoubtedly also varies over time within any given organization. Individuals or organizations that are regarded as important may pressure others to engage in unethical behavior, however, as *Focus on Ethics* suggests.

#### **Scarcity**

as noted previously, if something is plentiful; possession of it will not increase your power. A resource must be perceived as scarce to create dependency. Scarcity can help explain how low-ranking employees gain power if they have important knowledge not available to high-ranking employees. Possession of a scarce resource—in this case, important knowledge—makes those who don't have it dependent on those who do. Thus, an individual might refuse to show others how to do a job, or might refuse to share information, thereby increasing his or her importance.

## Non-substitutability

The fewer substitutes for a resource, the more power comes from control over that resource. At Apple Computer, for example, most observers, as well as the board, believed that no one other than Steve Jobs could turn the company around when they returned him to the role of CEO in 1997. In another example, when a union goes on strike and management is not permitted to replace the striking employees, the union has considerable control over the organization's ability to carry out its tasks. People are often able to ask for special rewards (higher pay or better assignments) because they have skills that others do not.

### Common Forms of Power in Organizations

<b>LEGITIMATE POWER</b>	Power that is granted by virtue of one's position in the organization
<b>REWARD POWER</b>	Power that exists when one person controls rewards that another person values
<b>COERCIVE POWER</b>	Power that exists when one person has the ability to punish or physically or psychologically harm someone else
<b>EXPERT POWER</b>	Power that exists when one person controls information that is valuable to someone else
<b>REFERENT POWER</b>	Power that exists when one person wants to be like or imitates someone else
<b>POSITION POWER</b>	Power that resides in a position, regardless of who is filling that position
<b>PERSONAL POWER</b>	Power that resides in the person, regardless of the position being filled

## References

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