

Power and Corporate Politics

In the first of two articles, Nick Cotter and Jo Potter examine the 9 sources of power and how to use them in order to get things done.

Introduction

If you thought that to be powerful, you had to become Chief Executive, with lots of resources to hand, along with a title that demands respect, then think again! The title and all its trappings give the Chief Executive only 3 out of the 9 recognised sources of power. The other 6 can be developed regardless of your position in the organisation.

So if you want to make things happen, don't worry so much about moving up the hierarchy, start by developing the other sources of power available to us all. If you have "made it to the top" then don't expect position, resource and coercion alone to make things happen in today's world of work –you also need to work on developing other sources of power.

What is power?

For our purposes (and with the help of Charles Handy), we are defining power as 'the ability to influence others and to thereby modify their attitudes and behaviour'.

Power is both elusive and transient and it is seldom one sided. It is also relative, as you will only be able to influence someone if they recognise and value the power you hold.

Power can be formal (eg that gained from position or control of resources) or it can be informal (eg that gained from respect for your knowledge, experience or integrity). In order to be influential in your organisation, you need to understand and use both your formal and informal power sources at the right time and with the right degree.

Formal Power

1. Position Power

Position power is hierarchical and status related and is usually underwritten by resource power. Position Power can create compliance without resentment. However, compliance often results in a lack of individual initiative and risk aversion or, in extreme circumstances, rebellion (think Mutiny on the Bounty).

2. Resource Power

Resource power or reward power, is the control over valued resources such as finance, head count etc. It isn't the magnitude or the extent of these resources that creates the power, but the value placed on them by others.

Resource power can gain you rapid action, but others often do the minimum required to gain access to the reward.

3. Coercive Power

Coercive power is the ability, and desire, to punish or to deprive others of something of value. A bullying boss can shout his or her way to compliance but this will breed resentment and fear, leading to defensive behaviours and eliminating open communication.

Informal Power

4. Expert Power

Respect is gained because of what you know and what you can do. Expert power can inspire commitment, but it is diminished if someone else has more expertise. This source of power has become more common-place with access to the Internet and within knowledge sharing cultures.

5. Experience Power

Linked to expert power, but more importantly the person with Experience Power has seen what works and what fails and why. This is the experienced warrior, not just the combat ready soldier. These are the people that make up the corporate memory and often make good mentors. When used negatively it can produce the 'seen it all before' mentality and block new ways of implementing old ideas that failed in the past.

6. Trust Power

Empathy, openness and consistent application of values engender integrity, which in turn creates trust. The main advantage of trust power is that it inspires loyalty to you as a person. Trust is difficult to build, easy to destroy and will need constant work to maintain it. Unfortunately it may take only one thoughtless communication to destroy it.

7. Numbers Power

Numbers power is about understanding financial & activity reports and how to use and memorise the information. When used negatively it is the ability to dismiss unfavourable results and manipulate numbers to

win the argument. Some people who are good at this will make up numbers and deliver them with such conviction whilst those of us with more uncertain memories don't dare to challenge them!

8. Network Power

Understanding the informal networks or 'Shadowside', will help you influence the informal side of organisational behaviour. We all know organisations where particular informal groups such as the smokers corner are a critical source of influence. These groups are particularly important in today's flatter structures and time and energy is required to sustain these networks.

9. Presence Power

Presence power is 'Charisma', the power of image and persuasive communication. Dress and the appropriate use of language is essential, with non-verbal communication, body language, poise, even how we walk, all having impact.

People assume you have something to say if you have presence power, and will listen more readily, however expectations raised must be deliverable, or this source of power will quickly evaporate.

How to use these sources of Power

We will all have a natural inclination towards certain of these sources of power. For some, informal networking comes easily whilst others naturally exude charisma and integrity. Whatever your position in the organisation, it is worth starting by identifying the informal areas that come naturally to you and building on these. You should also consider the areas that don't come naturally and think about how you might improve or develop one or more of them.

And if you are a Chief Executive, don't think that you can stand still! In today's market, the mighty fall very easily and you need to bolster your various sources of power as much as the rest of us.

Conclusion

The use power and influence does not have to be a stark choice between Machiavellian behaviour or naiveté, there are endless examples of those who use power and influence for the good of others. This of course is where both personal and organisational standards and values play a key role in appropriate application of power.

If you have any questions about the subjects covered in this white paper or you would like to find out more about how Oakleigh Consulting could help your organisation, please contact us on 0161 835 4100 or [email us](#).

Copyright

You may publish, quote or reproduce any white papers on this website on the condition that Oakleigh Consulting Ltd is notified, properly credited (and linked to) as the source, including our URL: www.oakleigh.co.uk.