Globalization Essay, Research Paper

A universal definition of the word “power” implies agreement about the word that does not change according to varying values, theories, or personal philosophies. To that end, power can be defined as: “the ability to get all you want from the environment, given what is available.” This definition can be applied to power in any context (e.g., military, organizational, political, personal, intimate, etc.). The definition is composed of three parts, each of which requires a brief explanation.

First, power is cast in terms of a single human dimension, the individual?s ability. This places total responsibility for obtaining what is wanted on the shoulders of the person who wants it. To the extent that you have gained an objective, you will be regarded as having been powerful. If, however, you have been less than successful in your attempt, rather than asking, “Why won’t these people cooperate?,” it is far more appropriate to ask, “How did I stop myself from getting what I wanted?” For example, if all members of a group suddenly become unresponsive in the middle of a team-building session, it is much more productive for the facilitator to look for clues that he or she may have missed, rather than to castigate the group members for being low risk-takers or “betrayers” of the intervention.

Second, the object of power is not focused on other people, but on obtaining something of value to you. This could be a personal desire such as being successful or being attractive, or it could be a successful outcome for a client or an organizational problem to be solved. Power is not an end in itself, but a process that has relevance only in terms of gaining results or achieving objectives. It is the outcome that is important. In this light, power can be measured objectively in terms of “track records,” i.e., number of things attempted against number of things gained.

Power is an intrapersonal phenomenon. You cannot empower or disempower someone else; nor can anyone else empower or disempower you.

Although power can be viewed as the ability to gain compliance or support from other people, this is not a necessary element. The pursuit of power for its own sake has little to recommend it as a healthy or productive pastime. Without a clear objective in mind, the pursuit of power for its own sake makes as much sense as the pursuit of oats when one owns neither a horse nor an oatmeal factory.

The third element in the definition of power relates to the last phrase: “given what is available.” One of the most important premises underlying the effective use of power is that each individual has responsibility for, and control of, him or herself. To exercise power effectively, you must first ascertain what you want. Next, you must be willing to take full responsibility for getting it. However, you must also be able to determine whether what you want is available from the environment. Although you are totally responsible for the desire for something and for its pursuit, you have no responsibility for its availability. This is a very important distinction.

For example, suppose that you want a particular expert to work with your group. You call this person and find out that he simply is not available. From that point on, any further pursuit of this particular objective is not an exercise in power but a venture in futility. That is, the limiting factor is not an overestimation of your power but, rather, an inaccurate assessment of what is available at this time.

Finally, although attempting something and not achieving it reflects a lack of power in that situation, to want something and not to attempt to achieve it is the ultimate in powerlessness.

Power has several identifying characteristics. They are as follows.

Power Is Uniquely Expressed. Despite numerous myths concerning what a powerful person looks like, there is no one way to express power. The strong, charismatic leader who charges ahead and is successful is no more powerful than his three-year-old daughter who crawls into his lap, puts her arms around his neck, murmurs, “Daddy, please. . . ” and gets what she wants. Power is expressed in an infinite number of ways because each person is unique. The only requirement for the effective expression of power is that it be authentic, that is, that the expression of power is characteristic of the individual.

Power Implies Risk. Whenever one attempts to gain something, a potential risk or cost is involved. A few of the possible costs or risks associated with power are risk of failure, loss of prestige, and loss of alternative opportunities.

Power Is Neutral. Power is neither good nor bad; unfortunately, some managers pursue power because it is “good,” and some leaders avoid it because it is “bad.” If “good” and “bad” are relevant in any sense, it is in the judgment of the thing that is wanted, not in the ability to obtain it.

Power Is Existential. The only time and place that power can ever be expressed is in the present. Your capacity to successfully pursue an objective is contingent on your ability to stay aware and responsive to changing conditions within yourself and the environment. The moment you start worrying about how things should be or about what might happen rather than attending to what is happening, you have lost the ability to make an impact.

All Power Resides in Conscious Choice. Of primary importance is the realization that the power is actualized in the conscious act of choosing. The particular choice that one makes at any given time is of secondary importance. Furthermore, locking oneself into a fixed position, value, or attitude, regardless of changing conditions or present circumstances, precludes choice and, thus, limits power. Two choices (i.e., “yes” or “no”) are better than one, but still not good enough because both are reactive. An “either/or” strategy frequently results in internal deadlock, increased frustration, and subsequent loss of effectiveness. The minimum number of choices needed for a full expression of power is three. This implies the ability to freely generate another option, which places one in a position of independence. The choices then become “Yes, I will,” “No, I won’t,” and “I will under the following circumstances.” When blocked, regardless of the situation, one’s power depends on one’s ability to generate a minimum of three alternatives and then to consciously choose among them.

One of the major problems in working comfortably with power is that power is frequently confused with, or mistaken for, other concepts. These concepts are: authority, leadership, manipulation, intimidation, and domination. It is important that leaders and managers distinguish between these concepts and power.

Authority. Power is the ability to obtain what you want, whereas authority can be defined as the organizational right to attempt to obtain what you want. Power and authority differ in several ways. The function of power is to obtain specific objectives, whereas the function of authority is to protect the integrity of the organization. For example, authority determines who reports to whom, areas of accountability, rules and regulations that are responsive to the needs of the organization, and so on. Authority is used only as a last resort to get things done. Whenever a manager relies on authority rather than power (e.g., “Do it because I?m the boss and I said to do it!”), that manager has disempowered himself or herself even if he or she attains a short-term objective.

Power originates in the individual; authority originates in the charter of the organization. Thus, there is no such thing as “position power.” Power can be exerted anywhere, whereas authority is limited by position. (I can tell my team member what to do, but I cannot tell your team member what to do.) Finally, although one’s power cannot be affected by anyone else, one’s authority can be increased or decreased by someone who holds a position of higher authority.

Leadership. Leadership can be defined as the art of getting people to perform a task willingly. It differs from power in that it focuses solely on compliance from others, requires an organizational identity of some kind (e.g., production department, scout troop, or military unit), and is in service to task completion for the common good. Power is not dependent on others, requires no special identity, and is in service to one’s own wants or objectives.

Manipulation. Manipulation simply means, “to handle”; however, in regard to power it usually connotes the secret use of power?the implication being that another person is being used without that person’s full awareness of what is happening. It implies such things as ulterior motive, withheld information, and/or using another person without any regard for that person?s views or welfare. Power, in contrast, is open, does not necessarily involve another person, and implies no ill will or disregard for others.

Intimidation. Intimidation is an extreme case of disempowerment because it is self-generated. Regardless of how aggressive or invasive someone else is, if you think or say, “That person intimidates me,” you have made the other person dominant and have rendered yourself powerless. Once you have done this, you are generally incapable of doing anything to change the situation. On the other hand, if your initial response to the other person’s aggressiveness is, “I am feeling intimidated by this person. How am I doing that to myself?,” you are taking responsibility for your own feelings. Having done that, you can begin to generate some options.

Domination. Domination is the concept most frequently confused with, or mistaken for, power. First, the objective of power is to gain an end; the objective of domination is to bend someone else to your will. Second, power is an attribute of one person, whereas domination, like the other concepts, requires a minimum of two people: the “bender” and at least one “bendee.” Third, the function of power is to strengthen or better oneself; the function of domination is to weaken others. Fourth, power is measured against one?s past performance; domination requires only that one be stronger than another person. Finally, the end result of power is freedom?one obtains what one wants and then moves on. The end result of domination is slavery. The dominator continually must expend effort and energy making sure that the subordinates are still subordinate.

Power can give a leader the potential to influence the group?s attitudes or behaviors towards the accomplishment of projects or goals. However, a leader can also misuse power. Using power too extensively creates separation, resistance, opposition, and disagreements. When a leader uses power without sensitivity to the feelings of others, they create authority with little influence. People appreciate leaders who ask them to think rather than just tell them what to do. Effective leaders use power to pull the group together and not push them towards a goal.

Leaders rely more on influence than their authority from power. Influence combines enthusiasm, excitement, charisma, and wisdom. When leaders use influence, they appeal to the group members’ values, skills, and knowledge. By keeping motivation and enthusiasm going, the group moves more successfully towards their goals. How a leader uses power will determine the influence the leader will have with the group.

To use power and influence effectively a person needs to understand the different types of power: Reward Power, Coercive Power, Legitimate Power, Expert Power and Referent Power.

Reward Power is when an individual has the opportunity to extend a reward to the group for accomplishing a project or goal. Ex: Upon completion of reports, we will have a cookout. In this example the individual promises to give the group a reward of a cookout after completing the necessary work.

Coercive Power gives an individual the ability to administer some type of punishment to the group or individual. The individual enforces the punishment when the completion of a goal or project falls short. Ex: If you do not clean the yard, you will not be able to use the car this weekend. In this case, not being able to use the car is the punishment for failing to clean the yard.

Legitimate Power gives an individual the right to ask for the accomplishment of a goal or project. The group feels an obligation to comply with the request of the individual. Ex: We would like all company vehicles washed this week. The employees have an obligation to complete this project.

Expert Power is when an individual has special knowledge or skills in the area or project the group is working on. Ex: Jim will lead us through this procedure because of his experience in working with plants. In this case Jim will lead the group through their workings because of his experience in the area.

Referent Power is when the group or individual makes accomplishments towards a goal or project because of their admiration for an individual. The group respects and wants the individual?s approval. Ex: An individual who has been active in several community projects appeals to the community to assist in a fundraiser. In this example people respond because of their respect and admiration for the individual.

When in a group set I often utilize all these different types of power, both consciously and unconsciously. These include:

Expert Power

• Give good technical suggestions.

• Share with team members considerable experience and/or training.

• Provide them with sound task or job related advice.

Referent Power

• Make group members feel I approve of them.

• Make them feel personally accepted.

• Make them feel important.

Coercive Power

• Give team members undesirable tasks or assignments.

• Make their work difficult or unpleasant.

• Make their work distasteful.

Reward Power

• Increase their rewards.

• Provide them with special benefits.

• Influence their grades.

Legitimate Power

• Make my team members feel like they satisfy their task requirements and jobs.

• Give them the feeling they have responsibilities to fulfill.

• Make them recognize that they have tasks to accomplish.

Probably no word in the world of management conjures up more myth and fervor than does the word “power.” In reality, there is nothing awesome or evil about power. It is just one of the essential forces in maintaining and developing strong, productive organizations and positive working relationship. Power is the foundation of organizational effectiveness and leadership practice, regardless of the specialty in which a leader or manager works. It is part of the everyday life in the work setting, and nothing can be accomplished without it.