

Negotiating Power in a Bureaucracy

Rachel Pokora

Nebraska Wesleyan University

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What is power?

Look at each of these statements about power and decide which two phrases most resonate with you? Why? Which two are least resonate? Why?

- Power is held by a few people.
- Money is necessary for real power.
- Land ownership grants power.
- Information is power.
- Education and expertise are sources of power.
- The government is the most powerful institution in society.
- Corporations are the most powerful institution in society.
- Power is concentrated in the hands of white males.
- The northern hemisphere has more power than the southern hemisphere.
- Power means getting others to do your bidding while thinking it's their idea.
- There is power in what is not said as well as in what is said.
- The trappings and the appearance of power don't mean anything.
- The trappings of power and the appearance of power are everything.
- Power has to be given.
- Power must be taken.
- Power is negotiated.
- Being powerful today doesn't mean being powerful tomorrow.
- Power reproduces itself: power begets power.
- Power lies not with what you know but whom you know.
- One institution's powers must be kept in check by other institutions' powers.

Then, find a partner and share what you believe about the statements. What do your responses to the statements tell you about how you define power?

French and Raven's Sources of Power: Based in Relationships

1. Coercive Power
2. Reward Power
3. Legitimate Power
4. Expert Power
5. Referent Power

Steven Lukes: Three-Dimensional Model of Power

Level One: Decision-Making Power

- Most observable
- Directives
- Making policy
- Example: "You say 'Jump,' I say 'How high?'"

Level Two: Non Decision-Making Power

- Less observable
- Control of the agenda (what is and isn't acceptable for discussion)
- Who wants to speak but doesn't ("What would you have said or done?")
- Example: Panopticon

Level Three: Ideological Power

- Least observable
- When a person doesn't even THINK about objecting, even when the matter goes against his/her own interest
- Influencing people's wishes and thoughts/shaping people's desires and beliefs (which averts conflict)
- Can look like consensus
- Example: Efficiency

Storytelling and Obedience

Not long after joining the XYZ consulting firm in New York City, a fledgling consultant is bound to be told a story about a senior partner, Jim, and a junior consultant, Dave, that goes more or less like this:

Jim and Dave are en route to a hospital at the tip of Manhattan for an appointment with the Chief Executive Officer, who has engaged the consulting firm to work through a merger application with another hospital. Unlike most New Yorkers who hail taxis when they need to get around, Jim is famous for driving his Mercedes everywhere. Jim and Dave have just picked up Jim's car from his garage on First Avenue. It's about a five-mile drive downtown to the hospital, but the men have plenty of time; the appointment's at 2, it's now 1:30. As the pair are just in sight of the Brooklyn Bridge, about a mile from the hospital, the Mercedes becomes stuck in one of Manhattan's signature traffic jams; nothing is moving for miles. Jim grows increasingly agitated; honking the car's sonorous horn, he leans out of the window at precarious angles and finally gets out of the car and paces the roadway. Not knowing what to do, Dave tries to calm Jim down by assuring him the jam will soon give way but Jim ignores him. Nothing budes, and the clock is ticking away; it's five minutes to two.

Suddenly, wordlessly, Jim gets back into the car and moves the shift into reverse. He backs the car up enough to turn its wheels to the right and propels the Mercedes up on the sidewalk of a lower income housing project that faces the roadway. Ramming down a chicken wire fence that separates the project from the road, he slaloms the car through the complex's courtyard, where children are playing stickball and women are hanging up laundry. Dave covers his face with his hands, but then, unable to stand it any longer, screams, "Sir, what are you doing? We'll only be a few minutes late." Jim ignores the protest, careens through the sidewalks of the project to its other entrance, steers the car along some streets, and finally pulls up at the hospital.

The two consultants arrive at the appointment precisely on time. Their meeting with the CEO goes smoothly; the officer is pleased with the work Dave has done on the case, and comments to Jim about his luck in recruiting such an able young man. When the appointment is over, Jim and Dave head back uptown, chatting pleasantly about the assignment.

Back at corporate headquarters, Jim and Dave walk into their own offices. Five minutes later, Jim's secretary summons Dave to Jim's office, telling him to bring the project's working papers along. Dave takes a quick look at the papers to be certain he can efficiently discuss his next ask on the project, and knocks on Jim's door. Jim greets him amiably and says, "Dave, you're fired. Clean out your desk and be out of here by 5 o' clock."

Empowerment (Hackman & Johnson)

Five reasons why leaders choose to share power:

1. increases job satisfaction and performance
2. sharing power fosters greater cooperation
3. collective survival
4. helps all experience personal growth and learning
5. prevents power abuses

Tyrannical bosses seek to maintain their positions by

- Tracking every move of employees
- Sending out conflicting messages about what they want
- Engaging in angry outbursts
- Demanding absolute obedience
- Putting followers down in public
- Acting arbitrarily
- Coercing subordinates into unethical behavior

Resistance (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, Ganesh, 2011)

Overt:

1. Exit
2. Voice
3. Loyalty
4. Neglect

Subtle:

1. Symbolic
2. Behind the scenes