

ORGANISATIONAL POWER FOR PERSONAL AND CORPORATE EFFECTIVENESS

AKINTUNDE, S.O.

*Department of Business Administration and Management.
Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta. Ogun State.Nigeria.*

ABSTRACTS

Despite its importance, negative connotation that surround power tend to prevents its conscious open discussions and its development and use for personal and organizational effectiveness. The consequence is a sense of powerlessness and frustration which undermine harmony and effectiveness at individual and organization levels. This paper therefore discusses the concept, sources and strategies for the development of power for personal and organization effectiveness. The paper revealed that, unlike authority relations, power relations is not static, one-directional or up or down phenomena as it is often thought to be. The exercise of power involves a costly and dynamic process.

Everyone could and need to develop and use it for personal effectiveness through the various sources discussed in this paper. The paper also points to the conclusion that power increases when positively used in ways which further the interest of the organization and its members. It gradually diminishes when used destructively to advance selfish or sectional interest. By this, this paper has provided tool for effective performance of job roles implementing new ideas, achieving job satisfaction and dealing with a major cause of disharmony and organizational ineffectiveness.

KEY WORDS: Power, Authority, Power Relations, Cost of Power, Personal Effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

Whenever people come together in an organization, the need also arise to direct and control their behaviours so that they can work harmoniously to achieve their common goals. It is in fact assumed that, when a person accepts a contract of employment as a worker under another, he/she has subordinated a substantial part of his/her right of personal direction to the organization (Akintunde, 2007). According to Slocum et.al (2007), power is the principal means by which organization ensures this direction. Also, organizations are filled with individuals who believe that they are being frustrated by their inability to operationalise their ideas for personal or organizational effectiveness due to their unfavorable power relationship with some other more powerful people in the organization. Despite these situations, the use or desire for power is often viewed negatively. This is because, according to Slocum, et.al(2007),power is often linked to the idea of punishment, control or unwanted influences. In a democracy, it is considered antisocial for someone to be able to make another do something contrary to his/her will (Mehrolad Mashayekhi;2004).

The acquisition of power, as a tool of personal or organizational effectiveness is seldom formally discussed. Such situation also stresses the need for people to have, not only technical skills, but also soft relational skills like how to develop, relate with and use power for personal effectiveness. In the light of this, the paper discusses the concept, need and strategies for the acquisition of power as a tool for achieving personal effectiveness in organizations.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Power is sometimes used interchangeably with authority. Though the terms are very close in meaning and are closely associated in practice, they are not the same. Jennifer & Gareth (2005) describes power as the right that one has to direct others. This right is a formal and not personal attribute of a position in an organization's hierarchy, hence it is usually delegated down the organizational hierarchy. The position determines the authority. This is the reason why it is possible for an individual to have power without formal authority and vice versa. This also explains the possibility of the emergence of an informal leader and the idea of a weak or strong leader. A weak leader would in this case be a person who has a formal right (authority) to direct but who does not have the power to do so successfully.

Power, on the other hand, is the influence of one person over the other (Leslie Lloyd, 2004). In other words, it is the ability to influence people, things, situations and decisions. It is the ability to employ force, mobilize resources and information etc., towards a preferred goal. To Richard (2003), for this influence to arise, three conditions must exist; resources, dependence and scarcity explained below:

- a. Resources- A person must possess something which others cherish but could not get. Examples are beauty, wealth, knowledge, position, etc.
- b. Dependence- The other must depend on that something for their welfare to function in one way or the other.
- c. Scarcity- There must be an absence of an easy or attractive alternative. The existence of such an alternative might reduce the influence (power) of the person trying to influence or turn the power situation in the opposite direction.

It is called political behavior when an attempt is made to use this power to influence the behavior of others and the course of events in an organization in order to protect their self interest or advance their own goal.

NEED FOR POWER

The acceptance of an offer of employment amounts to the subordination of the right of self control to the direction of the organization and or its managerial representatives. The ability to exercise this control over other members of the organization is called power. According to Slocum et al (2007), power is the principal means by which an organization ensures this direction. Thus, power is a resource for getting results. Without power organization personnel would experience a sense of powerlessness and inability to get results. This is the logic of the management doctrine of the balance of responsibility and authority. This is because, according to Kanter (2006), most achievements in organizations have implications for other functions and areas that are outside the scope of one individual. Therefore, the extra resources, managers need to go beyond the limit of their formal positions. For this, they need power. She therefore concludes that to produce results, power...has to circulate. Managers have to be in areas where power circulates, where it can be grabbed and invested".

DEVELOPMENT OF POWER

Every organization consists of an influence interaction- pattern in which individuals and groups continuously seek to influence others to think and act in particular ways. The development and use of power is therefore inevitable for personal and organizational effectiveness. This power can therefore be developed through the activation and self enhancement activities in the areas of its sources or bases. Many management writers (Slocum et al, 2007; Jennifer & Gareth, 2005; Leslie

Lloyd, 2004; Richard, 2003, etc.) now agree on four main sources or bases of power: Expertise, Personal, Positional and Reward. Others include Informational power, Coercive, e.t.c. These are however derivable from the four basic ones. For example, information and the ability to activate coercive power are derivable from positional power. Hence the identification and development of power shall be discussed under the four main sources of power discussed below:

Expert Authority:

This is the influence one exercises because of his expert knowledge and skill. This is when a person is consulted because of the recognition of his expertise or ability on a particular subject or problem. With expert power, you attract the respect and attention of important people in your organization. MAX me (2006) enjoins persons desiring power to begin with this. According to him, “when you concentrate on doing your job in an excellent fashion; as an EXPERT, you get expert POWER. You obtain the skills, attitude and information to get the best out of your interaction with stake-holders: including your opponents; boss, teachers, subordinates.” This is because when a person is recognized as being very good at what he or she does, he/she acquires greater power and influence than people who are only average or mediocre. Most times people are employed and placed on key positions, promoted, consulted and allowed to influence decision mainly based on this source of power.

Personal/Referent Power

This is the power that is derived from admirable personal characteristics, appealing character and leadership of a person rather than the knowledge or position of the person. Such characteristics could include the fact that he keeps his words, give due credits, show respect to others, is considerate and would not pretend or hurt people. etc. This form of power comes from who a person is; his personality, being liked and respected by the people around him or her. This is a source of power because; the more people like a person, the greater the influence that he/she will have over them. People listen to him and are open to his suggestions and ideas. Most otherwise competent and powerful people are not well placed, consulted or influential (powerful) because they lack this element. This type of power is often associated with “social intelligence” or “emotional intelligence”.

This form of power could be acquired through self examination and moral development. This include, among others, the cultivation of positive temperament, positive character traits, being friendly, self discipline, committed to common good. etc.

Positional or Legitimate Power:

This relates to influence that is derived from the holding of a particular position. Hence this often goes with job title. People believe that the holder of a particular position has legitimate right to exert influence and that the receiver has legitimate obligation to do so. Position power includes the ability to hire and fire, to reward and punish. Expert power and personal power should naturally (but do not always) lead to positional power. This is because promotion to the position of power should be based on competence and character. When this is not so, organization suffers disharmony and ineffectiveness and frustration, liquidation or loss of competent staff. So, to acquire positional power, one should develop competence and character or obtain expertise and personal power as discussed above.

Reward Power:

This is based on perceived ability to reward, punish or influence reward for a person. It is also called coercive power. The employees do what is required to avoid negative outcome. Disciplinary policies in organizations are generally based on this type of power. Acquiring this type of power requires the care and courage to punish or reward when and as due.

COST and PROCESS OF POWER

It is sometimes costly to influence another person's behavior. The cost may be low and reasonable or too high that the user will abandon its use. For example, to terminate the employment of an employee would involve the cost of hiring another person, difficulties, time, morale of other staff, and risk of being perceived as being unjust, etc.

It is also important to understand that power relations is not a state but a process, being a function of interactions in which each person is having some influence on the other through a dynamic dependency structure. According to Gbolahan et al (2009), in this structure, the power (P) of a person (x) over another (v) is equal to the dependency (D) of the person (v) upon (x) and vice versa: i.e. $P(XV) = D(VX)$ or $P(VX) = D(XV)$

The power relation is in balance where $P(XV) = D(VX)$ or $P(VX) = D(XV)$. When this happens, (the independent upon who power is exercised) would tend to make an effort to ensure balance by reducing the extent and or cost of being dependent by e.g.

- Terminating the relationship- (through resignation or forming alternative relations).
- Status re-evaluation (for possible justification of current power balance)
- Formation of coalition cliques (to achieve perceive proper balance of power)
- Continuous interactions (acceptance of current power balance)

A superior officer may use force or close supervision to enforce power required to achieve result where not given voluntarily (to procure power balance). However this not only a signal of a pathological organizational condition requiring Human Resource Management (HRM) intervention, it requires extra vigilance, time, and other resources which may have more profitable alternative uses. Most of the disharmony and ineffectiveness observed in organization are due to power imbalance. It is the duty of the human resource manager to ensure that the power balance is ensured and maintained through professional conduct of selection, placement and other personnel management processes. This would be achieved when he ensures that these processes ensure that positional power are based on expert and personal power.

Superior/Subordinate Officers Power Relations

It is assumed that whoever has wide discretion/authority or occupies a high status position in an organization necessarily has a great deal of power. Indeed, those who occupy high status position have authority and right to initiate and direct others in a course of action. Other subordinate officers are supposed to submit to their authority. However, to exercise this authority requires power which is the ability to influence a person to do what he would otherwise not have done (power). It takes place within a costly dynamic process which the person with authority may or may not afford. Hence, it is possible to have this authority without power and it is possible to exercise power without this authority. Also, though superior officer has right (authority) to command and direct a course of action;

1. He depends on his subordinates to carry out this command. To perform it himself implies a reduction in his status.

2. His power to use reward, authorize transfer, dismiss etc is limited by relative difficulties to get a replacement, social norms, organizational policies, conventions, trade union pressures and exercise of negative power by the subordinates, etc.

In addition, through the assignment of work, efficient subordinates may make the superior officer to dependent upon him for his own results. Below certain level of performance, the subordinate would tend to lose power, his place and his superior's dependence on him to lower work roles. However, above certain level of performance or consistently high level of performance tend to push him/her to higher rank with high range of potential power. The subordinate can therefore derive power over his boss through skill and effective performance of his work/roles, responsible/dependable conduct, access to information, exercise of negative power, etc.

USES OF POWER

Power may be used positively or negatively. According to Maxme (2010), when power is used skillfully to advance the interests of the organization, it is a positive force. It can improve the situation of all the people who are affected by it. It can be used to get the best of your principal/boss or organization. If power is used (or abused) to advance the interest of the individual or to the detriment of the organization, then power becomes a negative and destructive force that can harm the organization and the people in it. Such people eventually lose the power. It thus follows that the more capable, competent and reliable a person/worker prove himself to be at getting specific and important results for the organization, the more power, influence, and authority and money will flow to such a person or worker. The more valuable, happy and powerful at work he will become. Therefore the path to being powerful is to constantly strive to be knowledgeable, competent, reliable and friendly. This power could be expanded by using it to build coalition, expand resources, control decision premises, enhance or influence objective etc.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite its importance, negative connotations that surround power tend to prevents its conscious open discussions, development and use for personal and organizational effectiveness. The consequence is a sense of powerlessness and frustration which undermine harmony and effectiveness at individual and organizational levels. This paper therefore discusses the concept, sources and strategies for the development of power for personal and organizational effectiveness. The paper revealed that, unlike authority relations, power relations is not static, one-directional or up-or-down phenomena as it is often thought to be. The exercise of power involves a costly and dynamic process.

Everyone could and need to develop and use it for personal effectiveness through the various sources discussed in this paper. The paper also points to the conclusion that power increases when positively used in ways which further the interest of the organization and its members. It gradually diminishes when used destructively to advance selfish or sectional interest.

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