

Power and Status

Janet Smith has finally made it! She has a secretary outside her office to screen people and calls. Her secretary's office is plush and comfortable, and has a window. Her secretary is pleased with the office. Janet's office has a work area and a conversation area. Her desk is made of the finest mahogany and her chair is a plush swivel model. Her office is color coordinated, and at one end of the room she has windows that present her with a view of the city. She clearly has status.

Status is the thing many employees strive for more than pay. To be perceived as better than someone else or to have higher status than someone else can make otherwise fairly decent people lie, cheat, and steal. They want "things," status symbols that say they are *somebody*.

NATURE OF STATUS

Status is a person's role or position within a group or an organization. Status can be earned or awarded to us by our position in the organization. Because people quickly learn that status is something to work toward, everyone wants a slice of the pie. For example, attending some schools carries higher status than attending others (for example, Harvard University versus South Dakota State University). To be associated with certain groups is to gain a certain amount of the status associated with them (for example, to be a member of the football team, even a bench warmer). Wearing certain clothing connotes more status than wearing other clothing (Han, Nunes, & Dreze, 2010). Why did Izod, Guess, and Calvin, Klein become so popular? Was it because of the quality of the clothing? Hardly. It was because of the status associated with them. If you wore Calvins, you appeared to have money, power, and status. Some jobs carry higher status than other jobs. White-collar jobs are usually ranked higher than blue-collar jobs in terms of status. Being a corporate lawyer usually carries more status than being a sanitation engineer, but being a sanitation engineer has far more status than being a janitor. Which would you rather be, a meteorologist or a weather girl? How about a weather *boy*?

We must remember that status affects how some people respond to their jobs and how people interact with others who have status, as opposed to those who do not have status, in organizations. People think that with status come power and authority. That is not necessarily true. One can be of high status in terms of material items, but command little respect or have little power over others. However, because employees *think* status gives them power, they work very hard for it.

STATUS SYMBOLS

In the previous section, we said status could be earned or, sometimes, is afforded by us the position we hold in an organization. For example, corporate executives are often granted certain status symbols with their jobs. Many organizations feel that status is a means of rewarding an individual for a job well done. They also feel that their employees should have an image that is compatible with the company's image, so they provide status symbols (plush offices, parking spaces, company cars, company credit cards, expense accounts, and so on). Then again, some of us bring status symbols with us into our organization.

Some of the status symbols employees typically bring into organizations are age, ethnic background, religion, gender, parentage, competence, education, seniority, previous associates, skills, and experience. Although all employees might bring sources of status with them, a particular individual might have a higher social rank or status because he or she came from a better, more established school than the others. It is said that an MBA from the Harvard Business School is worth the money, time, and effort because the status it brings practically guarantees a good position with a good firm.

Aside from the obvious status symbols that employees bring into organizations, there are many symbols they are given or can earn. The following is a list of status symbols that people typically want in organizations: good salary, impressive job title, large office in a good location, nice furnishings, windows, a parking space, a secretary, privacy, a key to the building or office, nice clothing, a company car, privileges, a cell phone, possessions, a computer, a PDA, up-to-date equipment, longer lunches, vacations, time off if needed, and flexible hours. Most of these status symbols are visible or tangible; other symbols are not tangible or visible but can be earned. For instance, supervisors and peers respect you; others come to you for advice; and you are generally trusted to do your job—people are not constantly checking on you. However, it usually takes years of hard work and dedication to earn these symbols.

Most organizations attempt to motivate employees by using tangible status symbols as a means of motivation. This only works for a while because eventually the available symbols will be exhausted. The biggest drawback with using tangible, visible symbols of status to motivate people is that there is never “enough for everyone.” Even massive, well-funded organizations have employees who feel that some people have too much status while others have too little.

What are the ramifications of either too much or too little status in organizations? First, it can inhibit communication. If there is too much of a status differential between employees, they do not feel they can communicate with each other. If there is too little status differential, the supervisor is virtually like one of the subordinates and may not command their respect. When communication between employees and supervisors is inhibited, other problems follow. Second, employees do not develop solidarity or closeness to each other because they are constantly trying to earn what little status is available. Or there is so much status available they are all busy competing for it. Third, it interferes with work. People spend too much time thinking about how to get the status that is available rather than working. Fourth, it can cause resentment or conflict. In a system where there is too little status, people resent those who have it. Everything is relative. In a system where there is too much status, people will fight tooth and nail over it. This is not healthy competition—it is a battle.

In conclusion, status differences will always exist in organizations, but if we let status become a barrier between us and our peers or supervisors, then the communication flow will be inhibited and problems with solidarity and with the work may arise along with resentment.

COMMUNICATION AND STATUS

We are not trying to suggest that status symbols are unimportant. We realize status can be important in motivating people, helping personnel establish their role in an organization, giving employees an identity, and giving people a sense of inclusion. We are suggesting that when status gets out of control, communication can be affected negatively.

More communication in organizations is directed to higher-status persons than to those of lower status. Higher-status persons may become overloaded, and will have to learn to screen their messages. This can cause some resentment at the lower levels. People who get to talk with the higher-status person are automatically granted status themselves, whereas those who are ignored are automatically assigned lower status. However, employees must realize that many, many messages are directed at higher-status persons, and sometimes they simply cannot process all of them effectively.

In addition, there is always a risk for the lower-status person when communicating with the higher-status person. The lower-status person might get rewarded for communicating with the higher-status person; on the other hand, he or she might get rebuked. This can cause a lot of inhibition for the lower-status person. If he or she gets rebuked for communicating with the higher-status person, this reaffirms the person's lowly position and makes him or her feel even less capable and somewhat helpless. This rebuke is felt many times more painfully if it occurs in the presence of peers. Research indicates that lower-status men are more likely to express anger to a higher-status person than will a lower-status woman (Domagalski & Steelman, 2007). Thus, the angry male is also more likely to get a public rebuke.

Many employees, when communicating with higher-status persons, will attempt to say what they think the higher-status person wants to hear. This

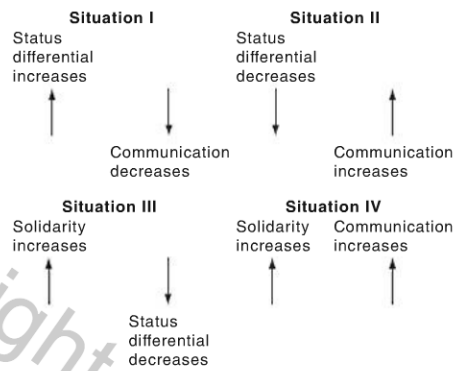


FIGURE 10.1

Impact of Status and Solidarity on Communication

means that supervisors often make decisions without having all the information because employees are too inhibited by the status barrier to tell the truth or report all the information.

We can see that perceived status barriers have a real impact on communication. We might conclude by suggesting that *as the perceived status differential increases between supervisor and subordinate, the quality of communication decreases* (see Figure 10.1). By this, we mean that as status differences go up, communication goes down. There is less communication, and it is probably less likely to be honest communication when it occurs. People become intimidated by extremes in status. We might also conclude that *as the perceived status difference decreases between supervisor and subordinate, the quality of communication increases*. By this we mean that as status differences go down, communication goes up. There is more communication, and it is probably more honest.

The most effective way of reducing status differential without giving up one's status is to build solidarity. *Building solidarity* means developing a solid, close, trustworthy relationship, one in which people know they can "be open and honest" and not be punished for it. We might conclude that *as perceived solidarity increases between supervisor and subordinate, the perceived status differential decreases*. This allows for more open and honest communication without fear of being rebuked or punished. Hence, *as perceived solidarity increases between supervisor and subordinate, quality of communication will increase*. How does one build a solid relationship with one's supervisor? One must work hard, do one's job well, and be reliable. It is not accomplished overnight. It takes time, hard work, and commitment.

POWER

One of the primary reasons we communicate is to influence others. Some sources are better at influencing than others. Why is it that some supervisors can get their employees to do so much while others are barely tolerated by their employees?

Much of it has to do with the type of influence used in organizations. Much of it depends on the power strategy used to change another's behavior.

In this section, we define an individual's power as the ability to have an effect on the behavior of another person or group. More specifically, this broader view sees *power* as the capacity to influence another person to do something he or she would not have done without having been influenced. A useful model of power is the one developed by French and Raven (1968) in which they explained the five bases of social power: coercive, reward, legitimate, referent, and expert. We have added two more: relational power and moral responsibility.

French and Raven describe *coercive power* as being based on an individual's expectations that he or she will be punished by another if he or she does not conform to that person's influence attempt. Thus, in terms of an organization, supervisors who are perceived as communicating with coercive power are those who communicate messages of threat or force in an attempt to influence subordinates. The strength of coercive power is contingent on the probability of punishment for not complying minus the probability of punishment for complying. For example, a manager's coercive power is contingent on the employee's perceptions of how probable it is that the manager will exact some punishment for nonconformance and the degree of negative consequences such punishment would entail, minus the probability of punishment from other sources (other employees) if the employee does comply. The use of coercive power will gain only compliance on the part of an individual—it will never create motivation.

Another way of looking at coercive power is referring to it as “negative KITA.” (KITA is an acronym advanced by Herzberg in 1968. It means “kick in the behind.” Herzberg's theories are better than his spelling.) Managers can threaten to dock pay, make people work overtime, give them poor schedules, give them the bad clients, and a number of other things—none of which are pleasant.

Reward power, on the other hand, is based on an individual's perception of another's ability to mediate rewards for her or him. This involves the ability both to administer positive things someone wants, and to remove or decrease negative things someone doesn't want. Thus, within the organization, persons who are perceived as communicating with reward power are not only those individuals who can grant pay raises and promotions, but also those who can eliminate menial tasks and other negative aspects of the system. The strength of reward power is contingent on an individual's perception of the probability that another can mediate a reward. Managers mediate rewards just as they mediate punishments.

Another way of looking at reward power is “positive KITA.” The question becomes, “Would you rather have the carrot or the stick?” The stick is coercive power, and the carrot is reward power. Reward power is only the flip side of coercive power. It does not get motivation, only compliance and movement. Although coercion and reward are the flip sides of the same coin, only the jaded among us would prefer the coercive side. For this reason, reward power is thought to be much more effective than it actually is. Usually the rewards available are limited. Hence, managers will soon run out of rewards to influence

workers' behaviors. Granted, some corporations seem to have almost unlimited rewards at their disposal, but most of us do not work in such corporations.

Power that gives a person the “right” to direct, evaluate, reward, and punish others within certain, usually well-defined limits, is referred to as *legitimate* or *assigned power*. In brief, use of legitimate power is based on an individual's perceptions of another's right to influence or prescribe behavior for her or him. Generally, legitimate power is characterized by positions in an organization's formal hierarchy (manager, principal, supervisor, and so on). It is sometimes referred to as “positional power.” This type of power usually does not lead to motivation, only movement. For example, the employee will respond but will never do the task again without being asked to do so again.

The fourth base of power is *expert power*. Expert power is based on an individual's perceptions of another's competence and knowledge in specific areas. Consequently, the strength of expert power depends on an individual's perception of another's competence or expertise in a given area. For example, many managers are well educated and have expertise in many areas that can benefit both the employees and the organizations. Hence, through expert power, managers and employees can gain respect and be willing to change behaviors and perform duties for the other that they ordinarily would not perform because they believe the other person knows better what should be done than they do themselves.

The fifth base of power, according to French and Raven (1968), is *referent power*. Referent power comes as a function of one person wanting to be like another person. When subordinates have a high respect for their supervisor and want to model themselves on that supervisor, this grants the supervisor considerable power. The supervisor no longer needs to tell the subordinate what to do, in many cases, but only do it her- or himself and the subordinate will imitate that behavior.

The first power base we add to this list is known as *relational power*. The existence of relational power is based on the personal relationships between people in the organization. When someone desires to please another person, the person doing the pleasing grants the other person relational power. It is very possible, even typical, for supervisors and subordinates to develop relational power with each other. Similarly, coworkers develop such relationships. The stronger the relationship between people, the more each one wishes to please the other, and the stronger the likelihood that the pleaser will behave in ways he or she believes the other would like the pleaser to behave. On the negative side, the “old boy” network system of relational power can be used to marginalize some organization members, particularly women. Young (1998), for example, reported that relational networks can be used to isolate and marginalize new, female members of an organization.

The final base of power is *moral responsibility*. This base rests on an individual's perceptions of responsibility to others—the organization, the supervisor, coworkers, subordinates, etc. All are expected to do their share, help their colleagues, meet the norms, not foul up the system, and cooperate. People will do a lot to avoid others thinking badly of them—to save face and to be a part

of the group. Often these things get done because someone feels responsible for doing them, and often they feel that way because of what someone else has suggested to them.

It is clear that the area of power has many options for influencing people. The question is, “Which types of power will motivate people and which types of power will not?” Before this can be answered, we have to review the three levels of influence (Kelman, 1961) that can be achieved. Employees can comply with, identify with, or internalize the thinking of another.

Compliance occurs when a person accepts another’s request because he or she can see either potential reward for complying or potential punishment for not complying. For example, an employee might comply with the requests of her or his boss to gain a reward (a day off) or to avoid punishment (lose a day’s pay). Compliance is when people just “do something.” They do not necessarily agree that it should be done, or care about it, or identify with it—they just do it to get a reward or avoid punishment. Hence, any satisfaction gained from compliance is mainly superficial, and there is no motivation to do the act again unless a reward is attached or force is threatened again. Compliance leads to movement—a temporary change in behavior—on the part of the employee to avoid punishment or receive a reward. Managers who operate within the framework of Theory X presume that employees work best under the compliance model.

To be certain a subordinate will comply in the face of potential punishments or rewards, the manager must be able to illustrate concern, control, and scrutiny. For example, the law-enforcement agencies of this country have shown their concern about speeding by having speed restrictions in certain areas. They have shown that they can control speeding with road monitors and that they can scrutinize or watch for offenders by the use of radar. When all of these methods are available, compliance with speed laws is more likely to occur. However, when any one of them is missing, compliance is less likely. For example, if the radar is turned off for a day, offenders know they are not being scrutinized, and they will speed even if concern and control are present. Managers who say they want employees to do certain distasteful tasks, but then leave the work area, have told the employees they are not *really* concerned about the task. The employees probably will do only a halfway job of it, if that much. Similarly, managers may often communicate a lack of concern regarding compliance, depending on how they communicate the job instruction. McCallister (1983) found that managers expected compliance from their subordinates only when they used a directive, autocratic style to deliver the message. Further, employees seemed to be able to pick up on the difference, i.e., that when the manager used a nonautocratic request for compliance, the manager wasn’t really serious. Thus, the subordinates seemed to sense when the manager was “going through the motions” of complying with an order from above, but didn’t really expect his subordinates to follow through on it. Compliance is also an issue when volunteer workers are involved, since they have no organizational incentive to comply. In such instances, the most effective strategies are those that appealed to the volunteers’ self-esteem or to the value of the work itself (Adams, Schlueter, & Barge, 1988).

Compliance only gets people to conform, not to identify with or internalize a specific idea. *Identification* occurs when an individual accepts the influence of another person or group because he or she identifies with and wants to establish a relationship with that particular person or group. Identification with the person (a manager) or group (an organization) is paramount, and often the employee will even model the behaviors and dress of the person or organization. When new employees identify with an organization, they will start conforming to the ideas and requests of the organization. The amount of change and motivation achieved by the identification mode is much higher than in the compliance mode. Changes tend to be long term, at least in the sense that the person can identify with the group's goals and values. This type of change can also lead to motivation, not just movement, on the part of employees. They are likely to perform desired behaviors even when no supervisor is present and when no special reward or punishment is likely to be given.

Internalization occurs when an employee adopts a way of thinking or behaving because it is intrinsically rewarding and is similar to that person's value system. When an idea or behavior is internalized, it is integrated into the individual's existing value system and is a part of the way the person thinks or behaves. It is undistinguishable from the person's already existing behaviors in the same area. For example, if we do not believe in cheating, then it would be difficult for us to cheat on corporate expenses. We automatically comply, identify with, and internalize into our system the behavior of not cheating on expenses.

When internalization is achieved, the employee is induced to perform the behaviors regardless of the scrutiny of his or her boss. He or she has become internally motivated to perform and feels this is the right or good thing to do. The employee often will perform tasks without even being asked to do them. People who are internally motivated are close to being classified as organizational men or women.

As we can see, compliance leads to movement (temporary changes in behavior), not motivation (long-term changes in behavior). Identification and internalization do lead to motivation. However, if the compliant behavior is reinforced and rewarded, it may pave the way for identification to occur at some point. Any of the previously mentioned levels of influence is dependent on the type of power employed by a manager (see Table 10.1).

It is clear that the type of power employed by a manager affects the level of influence over an employee. All types of power will lead to compliance. But only two types of power will lead to identification and internalization—referent and expert. Remember, with compliance there is minimal commitment, and the employee will do the job well only as long as he or she is being scrutinized. With identification there is understanding and motivation to do tasks. With internalization there is understanding, commitment, dedication, and motivation to do tasks without even being asked to do them. Hence, the selection of power strategies is obvious—the supervisor should use referent and expert power when at all possible. Most organizations grant managers

the first three types of power: coercive, reward, and legitimate. Relational and

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TABLE 10.1

Types of Power and Impact on Levels of Influence

Five Types of Power	Levels of Influence		
	Compliance	Identification	Internalization
Coercive	✓		
Reward	✓		
Legitimate or Assigned	✓		
Referent	✓	✓	✓
Expert	✓	✓	✓
Moral Responsibility	✓		
Relational	✓		

moral responsibility will develop as supervisors and subordinates work together. But managers must earn referent and expert power. This is not as easy as it may seem. Many managers have never learned to develop a personal rewarding relationship with employees. Hence, many managers are not comfortable with referent and expert power. They do not have any, and thus they must resort to punishment, rewards, or legitimate authority.

Power can be influential only when an employee is willing to acknowledge that the manager has any power. If an employee is not concerned about being punished or threatened with job loss, then the manager has no influence—not even compliance. In addition, systems quickly “run out” of ways to punish and reward personnel. Hence, working from a punishment or reward model will work for only a while. Even to work that long, one has to know what punishes a person and what rewards a person. If you threaten to send someone home, he or she might not find this as punishment; it might be seen as a reward. If you promise to promote employees if they do well, some might see this as punishment, not reward. The power bases of coercion and reward are imperfect because some people simply cannot be threatened and others may not be rewarded. And worse yet, we may not be able to distinguish the rewards from the punishments for others.

FROM THE PEON'S PERSPECTIVE

As employees, what power bases do we have? We clearly do not have coercion, reward, or legitimate, at least not when we are first hired. As we become more experienced, we develop some of each, and we are very likely to develop some relational and moral responsibility power as well. We are even more likely to develop referent and expert power as we display our competence at our work. But we must exercise the power we develop with care. Generally, you should avoid threatening to punish your supervisor—you might lose. For

example, one employee we know threatened her boss with leaving the system. Her boss, who was a manager, threatened her with leaving the system. Use beyond the authorized user or valid subscription date represents a copyright violation.

if he did not give her what she wanted. What she did not realize was that by leaving she was rewarding him, so he made sure he did not grant her request. She left. Hence, employees have to be cautious about trying to use coercion or reward to influence their supervisors. It might backfire.

No one has power over anyone who does not grant her or him that power. We grant someone reward power over us when we decide we want the reward. We grant someone coercive power over us when we decide we want to avoid a punishment. We grant someone legitimate power over us when we decide he or she has the right to make certain demands of us. We grant someone expert power over us when we decide he or she knows more about something than we do. And we grant referent power to someone when we decide we like and respect her or him and would like to be more like that person. In a free society, power is granted, not taken. Remember, you can always quit. If you decide you are not going to quit, then you are granting another person power over you.

Most power is relationally defined. Thus, you can develop power to control your supervisor's behavior to some degree, just as he or she receives from you some power to control your behavior. These powers are negotiated between supervisors and subordinates as a function of the relationships they build with each other. If you want to build a strong relationship with your supervisor, in all likelihood you can do so. Do what you were hired to do—your job. And do it well. This is the way to build the expert power base. When the supervisor asks your opinion about something concerning the job, respond in a positive manner. Let your supervisor “know you know your job.” This will help build your credibility while at the same time building some power.

Next, build your referent base. This is built by communicating liking and respect for your supervisor. Demonstrate to your supervisor that you respect her or him and the organization. We don't mean you should be a “brown-nose.” We mean be honestly dedicated and committed to the job and let your supervisor know you are dependable. How might an employee build referent and expert power? First, do your job well without whining. Let's face it. All jobs have tasks people do not like. Do them and go on. No one likes a whiner. In addition, avoid associating with whiners. They will want you to start whining too. Second, if your supervisor asks your advice, give the best answer you have or admit you are not sure, but would be willing to try and find an answer. Third, spend time observing and learning the right norms and behaviors to make you a more dedicated employee—one who looks as if he or she belongs in the organization. Fourth, avoid special-interest groups or groups that want to create tension in the organization. Many a good employee has been ruined by getting in with the perpetual protestors in the organization. Fifth, communicate with your supervisor in a positive verbal and nonverbal manner.

The main results of this approach will be that your communication with your supervisor will be improved, you will have established an influence base for yourself, and you will be a more satisfied, motivated employee. You will be able to influence your supervisor on occasion, and perhaps have input on some major decisions in the future. True, some of your peers may see you as a bit of a “kiss up.” Smile all the way to the promotion, and do not be late for

their going-away parties!

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