

Understanding Power in Organizations

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Norton Long, a political scientist, wrote, "People will readily admit that governments are organizations. The converse—that organizations are governments—is equally true but rarely considered."¹ But organizations, particularly large ones, are like governments in that they are fundamentally political entities. To understand them, one needs to understand organizational politics, just as to understand governments, one needs to understand governmental politics.

Ours is an era in which people tend to shy away from this task. As I browse through bookstores, I am struck by the incursion of "New Age" thinking, even in the business sections. New Age can be defined, I suppose, in many ways, but what strikes me about it are two elements: (1) a self-absorption and self-focus, which looks toward the individual in isolation; and (2) a belief that conflict is largely the result of misunderstanding, and if people only had more communication, more tolerance, and more patience, many (or all) social problems would disappear. These themes appear in books on topics ranging from making marriages work to making organizations work. A focus on individual self-actualization is useful, but a focus on sheer self-reliance is not likely to encourage one to try to get things done with and through other people—to be a manager or a leader. "Excellence can be achieved in a solitary field without the need to exercise leadership."² In this sense, John Gardner's (former secretary of HEW and the founder of Common Cause) concerns about community are part and parcel of a set of con-

cerns about organizations and getting things accomplished in them.³ One can be quite content, quite happy, quite fulfilled as an organizational hermit, but one's influence is limited and the potential to accomplish great things, which requires interdependent action, is almost extinguished.

If we are suspicious of the politics of large organizations, we may conclude that smaller organizations are a better alternative. There is, in fact, evidence that the average size of establishments in the United States is decreasing. This is not just because we have become more of a service economy and less of a manufacturing economy; even within manufacturing, the average size of establishments and firms is shrinking. The largest corporations have shed thousands, indeed hundreds of thousands of employees—not only middle managers, but also production workers, staff of all kinds, and employees who performed tasks that are now contracted out. Managers and employees who were stymied by the struggles over power and influence that emerge from interdependence and differences in point of view have moved to a world of smaller, simpler organizations, with less internal interdependence and less internal diversity, which are, as a consequence, less political. Of course, such structural changes only increase interdependence among organizations, even as they decrease interdependence and conflict within these organizations.

I see in this movement a parallel to what I have seen in the management of our human resources.

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Many corporations today solve their personnel problems by getting rid of the personnel. The rationale seems to be that if we can't effectively manage and motivate employees, then let's turn the task over to another organization. We can use leased employees or contract workers, or workers from temporary help agencies, and let those organizations solve our problems of turnover, compensation, selection, and training.

It is an appealing solution, consistent with the emphasis on the individual, which has always been strong in U.S. culture, and which has grown in recent years. How can we trust large organizations when they have broken compacts of long-term employment? Better to seek security and certainty within oneself, in one's own competencies and abilities, and in the control of one's own activities.

There is, however, one problem with this approach to dealing with organizational power and influence. It is not clear that by ignoring the social realities of power and influence we can make them go away, or that by trying to build simpler, less interdependent social structures we succeed in building organizations that are more effective or that have greater survival value. Although it is certainly true that large organizations sometimes disappear,⁴ it is also true that smaller organizations disappear at a much higher rate and have much worse survival properties. By trying to ignore issues of power and influence in organizations, we lose our chance to understand these critical social processes and to train managers to cope with them.

By pretending that power and influence don't exist, or at least shouldn't exist, we contribute to what I and some others (such as John Gardner) see as the major problem facing many corporations today, particularly in the United States—the almost trained or produced incapacity of anyone except the highest-level managers to take action and get things accomplished. As I teach in corporate executive programs, and as I compare experiences with colleagues who do likewise, I hear the same story over and over again. In these programs ideas are presented to fairly senior executives, who then work in groups on the implications of these ideas for their firms. There is real strength in the experience and knowledge of these executives, and they often come up with insightful recommendations and ideas for improving their organizations. Perhaps they discover the wide differences in effectiveness that exist

in different units and share suggestions about how to improve performance. Perhaps they come to understand more comprehensively the markets and technologies of their organizations, and develop strategies for both internally oriented and externally oriented changes to enhance effectiveness. It really doesn't matter, because the most frequently heard comment at such sessions is, "My boss should be here." And when they go back to their offices, after the stimulation of the week, few managers have either the ability or the determination to engineer the changes they discussed with such insight.

I recall talking to a store manager for a large supermarket chain with a significant share of the northern California grocery market. He managed a store that did in excess of \$20 million in sales annually, which by the standards of the average organization makes him a manager with quite a bit of responsibility—or so one would think. In this organization, however, as in many others, the responsibilities of middle-level managers are strictly limited. A question arose as to whether the store should participate in putting its name on a monument sign for the shopping center in which the store was located. The cost was about \$8,000 (slightly less than four hour's sales in that store). An analysis was done, showing how many additional shoppers would need to be attracted to pay back this small investment, and what percentage this was of the traffic count passing by the center. The store manager wanted the sign. But, of course, he could not spend even this much money without the approval of his superiors. It was the president of the northern California division who decided, after a long meeting, that the expenditure was not necessary.

There are many lessons that one might learn from this example. It could be seen as the result of a plague of excessive centralization, or as an instance of a human resource management policy that certainly was more "top down" than "bottom up." But what was particularly interesting was the response of the manager—who, by the way, is held accountable for this store's profits even as he is given almost no discretion to do anything about them. When I asked him about the decision, he said, "Well, I guess that's why the folks at headquarters get the big money; they must know something we don't." Was he going to push for his idea, his very modest proposal? Of course no, he said. One gets along by just biding one's time, going

along with whatever directives come down from the upper management.

I have seen this situation repeated in various forms over and over again. I talk to senior executives who claim their organizations take no initiative, and to high-level managers who say they can't or won't engage in efforts to change the corporations they work for, even when they know such changes are important, if not essential, to the success and survival of these organizations. There are politics involved in innovation and change. And unless and until we are willing to come to terms with organizational power and influence, and admit that the skills of getting things done are as important as the skills of figuring out what to do, our organizations will fall further and further behind. The problem is, in most cases, not an absence of insight or organizational intelligence. Instead the problem is one of passivity, a phenomenon that John Gardner analyzed in the following way:

In this country—and in most other democracies—power has such a bad name that many good people persuade themselves they want nothing to do with it. The ethical and spiritual apprehensions are understandable. But one cannot abjure power. Power, as we are now speaking of it . . . is simply the capacity to bring about certain intended consequences in the behavior of others. . . . In our democratic society we make grants of power to people for specified purposes. If for ideological or temperamental reasons they refuse to exercise the power granted, we must turn to others. . . . To say a leader is preoccupied with power is like saying that a tennis player is preoccupied with making shots his opponent cannot return. Of course leaders are preoccupied with power! The significant questions are: What means do they use to gain it? How do they exercise it? To what ends do they exercise it?⁵

If leadership involves skill at developing and exercising power and influence as well as the will to do so, then perhaps one of the causes of the so-called leadership crisis in organizations in the United States is just this attempt to sidestep issues of power. This diagnosis is consistent with the arguments made by Warren Bennis and his colleagues, who have studied leaders and written on leadership. For instance, Bennis and Nanus noted that one of the major problems facing or-

ganizations today is not that too many people exercise too much power, but rather the opposite:

These days power is conspicuous by its absence. Powerlessness in the face of crisis. Powerlessness in the face of complexity. . . . power has been sabotaged. . . . institutions have been rigid, slothful, or mercurial.⁶

They go on to comment on the importance of power as a concept for understanding leadership and as a tool that allows organizations to function productively and effectively:

However, there is something missing . . . POWER, the basic energy to initiate and sustain action translating intention into reality, the quality without which leaders cannot lead. . . . power is at once the most necessary and the most distrusted element exigent to human progress. . . . power is the basic energy needed to initiate and sustain action or, to put it another way, the capacity to translate intention into reality and sustain it.⁷

Such observations about power are not merely the province of theorists. Political leaders, too, confirm that the willingness to build and wield power is a prerequisite for success in public life. In this consideration of power and leadership, Richard Nixon offered some observations that are consistent with the theme of this article:

Power is the opportunity to build, to create, to nudge history in a different direction. There are few satisfactions to match it for those who care about such things. But it is not happiness. Those who seek happiness will not acquire power and would not use it well if they did acquire it.

A whimsical observer once commented that those who love laws and sausages should not watch either being made.

By the same token, we honor leaders for what they achieve, but we often prefer to close our eyes to the way they achieve it. . . .

In the real world, politics is compromise and democracy is politics. Anyone who would be a statesman has to be a successful politician first. Also, a leader has to deal with people and nations as they are, not as they should be. As a result, the qualities required for leadership are not necessarily

those that we would want our children to emulate—unless we wanted them to be leaders.

In evaluating a leader, the key question about his behavioral traits is not whether they are attractive or unattractive, but whether they are useful.⁸

OUR AMBIVALENCE ABOUT POWER

That we are ambivalent about power is undeniable. Rosabeth Kanter, noting that power was critical for effective managerial behavior, nevertheless wrote, "Power is America's last dirty word. It is easier to talk about money—and much easier to talk about sex—than it is to talk about power."⁹ Gandz and Murray did a survey of 428 managers whose responses nicely illustrate the ambivalence about power in organizations:¹⁰ Some items from their survey, along with the percentage of respondents reporting strong or moderate agreement, are reproduced in Table 18.1. The concepts of power and organizational politics are related; most authors, myself included, define organizational politics as the exercise or use of power, with power be-

ing defined as a potential force. Note that more than 90% of the respondents said that the experience of workplace politics is common in most organizations, 89% said that successful executives must be good politicians, and 76% said that the higher one progresses in an organization, the more political things become. Yet 55% of these same respondents said that politics were detrimental to efficiency, and almost half said that top management should try to get rid of politics within organizations. It is as if we know that power and politics exist, and we even grudgingly admit that they are necessary to individual success, but we nevertheless don't like them.

This ambivalence toward, if not outright disdain for, the development and use of power in organizations stems from more than one source. First, there is the issue of ends and means—we often don't like to consider the methods that are necessary to get things accomplished, as one of the earlier quotes from Richard Nixon suggests. We are also ambivalent about ends and means because the same strategies and processes that may produce outcomes we desire can also be used to produce results that we consider undesirable. Second, some fundamental lessons we learn in school really hinder our appreciation of power and influence. Finally, in a related point, the perspective from which we judge organizational decisions often does not do justice to the realities of the social world.

Table 18.1. Managers' Feelings About Workplace Politics

Statement	Percentage Expressing Strong or Moderate Agreement
The existence of workplace politics is common to most organizations	93.2
Successful executives must be good politicians	89.0
The higher you go in organizations, the more political the climate becomes	76.2
Powerful executives don't act politically	15.7
You have to be political to get ahead in organizations	69.8
Top management should try to get rid of politics within the organization	48.6
Politics help organizations function effectively	42.1
Organizations free of politics are happier than those where there are a lot of politics	59.1
Politics in organizations are detrimental to efficiency	55.1

Source: Jeffrey Gandz and Victor V. Murray, "The Experience of Workplace Politics," *Academy of Management Journal*, 23 (1980).

Ends and Means

On Saturday, September 25, 1976, an elaborate testimonial dinner was held in San Francisco for a man whose only public office was as a commissioner on the San Francisco Housing Authority board. The guest list was impressive—the mayor, George Moscone; Lieutenant Governor Mervyn Dymally, at that time the highest-ranking Afro-American in elected politics; District Attorney Joe Freitas; Democratic Assemblyman Willie Brown, probably the most powerful and feared individual in California politics; Republican State Senator Milton Marks; San Francisco Supervisor Robert Mendelsohn; the city editor of the morning newspaper; prominent attorneys—in short, both Democrats and Republicans, a veritable who's who of the northern California political establishment. The man they were there to honor had recently met personally with the president's wife, Rosalynn Carter. Yet when the world heard more of this guest of honor, some two

years later, it was to be with shock and horror at what happened in a jungle in Guyana. The person being honored that night in September 1976—who had worked his way into the circles of power in San Francisco using some of the very same strategies and tactics described in this article—was none other than Jim Jones.¹¹

There is no doubt that power and influence can be acquired and exercised for evil purposes. Of course, most medicines can kill if taken in the wrong amount, thousands die each year in automobile accidents, and nuclear power can either provide energy or mass destruction. We do not abandon chemicals, cars, or even atomic power because of the dangers associated with them; instead we consider danger an incentive to get training and information that will help us to use these forces productively. Yet few people are willing to approach the potential risks and advantages of power with the same pragmatism. People prefer to avoid discussions of power, apparently on the assumption that "If we don't think about it, it won't exist." I take a different view. John Jacobs, now a political editor for the *San Francisco Examiner*, co-authored a book on Jim Jones and gave me a copy of it in 1985. His view, and mine, was that tragedies such as Jonestown could be prevented, not by ignoring the processes of power and influence, but rather by being so well schooled in them that one could recognize their use and take countermeasures, if necessary—and by developing a well-honed set of moral values.

The means to any end are merely mechanisms for accomplishing something. The something can be grand, grotesque, or, for most of us, I suspect, somewhere in between. The end may not always justify the means, but neither should it automatically be used to discredit the means. Power and political processes in organizations can be used to accomplish great things. They are not always used in this fashion, but that does not mean we should reject them out of hand. It is interesting that when we use power ourselves, we see it as a good force and wish we had more. When others use it against us, particularly when it is used to thwart our goals or ambitions, we see it as an evil. A more sophisticated and realistic view would see it for what it is—an important social process that is often required to get things accomplished in interdependent systems.

Most of us consider Abraham Lincoln to have been a great president. We tend to idealize his accom-

plishments: he preserved the Union, ended slavery, and delivered the memorable Gettysburg Address. It is easy to forget that he was also a politician and a pragmatist—for instance, the Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves in the Confederacy, but not in border states that remained within the Union, whose support he needed. Lincoln also took a number of actions that far overstepped his constitutional powers. Indeed, Andrew Johnson was impeached for continuing many of the actions that Lincoln had begun. Lincoln once explained how he justified breaking the laws he had sworn to uphold:

My oath to preserve the Constitution imposed on me the duty of preserving by every indispensable means that government, that nation, of which the Constitution was the organic law. Was it possible to lose the nation and yet preserve the Constitution? . . . I felt that measures, otherwise unconstitutional, might become lawful by becoming indispensable to the preservation . . . of the nation.¹²

Lessons to Be Unlearned

Our ambivalence about power also comes from lessons we learn in school. The first lesson is that life is a matter of individual effort, ability, and achievement. After all, in school, if you have mastered the intricacies of cost accounting, or calculus, or electrical engineering, and the people sitting on either side of you haven't, their failure will not affect your performance—unless, that is, you had intended to copy from their papers. In the classroom setting, interdependence is minimized. It is you versus the material, and as long as you have mastered the material, you have achieved what is expected. Cooperation may even be considered cheating.

Such is not the case in organizations. If you know your organization's strategy but your colleagues do not, you will have difficulty accomplishing anything. The private knowledge and private skill that are so useful in the classroom are insufficient in organizations. Individual success in organizations is quite frequently a matter of working with and through other people, and organizational success is often a function of how successfully individuals can coordinate their activities. Most situations in organizations resemble football more than golf, which is why companies often scan résumés to find not only evidence of individual achievement but also signs that the person is skilled at work-

ing as part of a team. In achieving success in organizations, "power transforms individual interests into coordinated activities that accomplish valuable ends."¹³

The second lesson we learn in school, which may be even more difficult to unlearn, is that there are right and wrong answers. We are taught how to solve problems, and for each problem, that there is a right answer, or at least one approach that is more correct than another. The right answer is, of course, what the instructor says it is, or what is in the back of the book, or what is hidden away in the instructor's manual. Life appears as a series of "eureka" problems, so-called because once you are shown the correct approach or answer, it is immediately self-evident that the answer is, in fact, correct.

This emphasis on the potential of intellectual analysis to provide the right answer—the truth—is often, although not invariably, misplaced. Commenting on his education in politics, Henry Kissinger wrote, "Before I served as a consultant to Kennedy, I had believed, like most academics, that the process of decision-making was largely intellectual and all one had to do was to walk into the President's office and convince him of the correctness of one's view. This perspective I soon realized is as dangerously immature as it is widely held."¹⁴ Kissinger noted that the easy decisions, the ones with right and wrong answers that can be readily discerned by analysis, never reached the president, but rather were resolved at lower levels.

In the world in which we all live, things are seldom clearcut or obvious. Not only do we lack a book or an instructor to provide quick feedback on the quality of our approach, but the problems we face often have multiple dimensions—which yield multiple methods of evaluation. The consequences of our decisions are often known only long after the fact, and even then with some ambiguity.

AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON DECISION MAKING

Let me offer an alternative way of thinking about the decision-making process. There are three important things to remember about decisions. First, a decision by itself changes nothing. You can decide to launch a new product, hire a job candidate, build a new plant, change your performance evaluation system, and so

forth, but the decision will not put itself into effect. As a prosaic personal example, recall how many times you or your friends "decided" to quit smoking, to get more exercise, to relax more, to eat healthier foods, or to lose weight. Such resolutions often fizzle before producing any results. Thus, in addition to knowledge of decision science, we need to know something about "implementation science."

Second, at the moment a decision is made, we cannot possibly know whether it is good or bad. Decision quality, when measured by results, can only be known as the consequences of the decision become known. We must wait for the decision to be implemented and for its consequences to become clear.

The third, and perhaps most important, observation is that we almost invariably spend more time living with the consequences of our decisions than we do in making them. It may be an organizational decision, such as whether to acquire a company, change the compensation system, fight a union-organizing campaign; or a personal decision, such as where to go to school, which job to choose, what subject to major in, or whom to marry. In either case, it is likely that the effects of the decision will be with us longer than it took us to make the decision, regardless of how much time and effort we invested. Indeed, this simple point has led several social psychologists to describe people as rationalizing (as contrasted with rational) animals.¹⁵ The match between our attitudes and our behavior, for instance, often derives from our adjusting our attitudes after the fact to conform to our past actions and their consequences.¹⁶

If decisions by themselves change nothing; if, at the time a decision is made, we cannot know its consequences; and if we spend, in any event, more time living with our decisions than we do in making them, then it seems evident that the emphasis in much management training and practice has been misplaced. Rather than spending inordinant amounts of time and effort in the decision-making process, it would seem at least as useful to spend time implementing decisions and dealing with their ramifications. In this sense, good managers are not only good analytic decision makers; more important, they are skilled in managing the consequences of their decisions. "Few successful leaders spend much time fretting about decisions once they are past. . . . The only way he can give adequate attention to the decisions he has to make tomorrow is to put those of yesterday firmly behind him."¹⁷

There are numerous examples that illustrate this point. Consider, for instance, the acquisition of Fairchild Semiconductor by Schlumberger, an oil service company.¹⁸ The theory behind the merger was potentially sound—to apply Fairchild's skills in electronics to the oil service business. Schlumberger wanted, for example, to develop more sophisticated exploration devices and to add electronics to oil servicing and drilling equipment. Unfortunately, the merger produced none of the expected synergies:

When Schlumberger tried to manage Fairchild the same way it had managed its other business units, it created many difficulties. . . . resources were not made available to R&D with the consequence of losing technical edge which Fairchild once had. Creative . . . technical people left the organization and the company was unable to put technical teams together to pursue new technological advancement.¹⁹

A study of 31 acquisitions found that "problems will eventually emerge after acquisitions that could not have been anticipated. . . . both synergy and problems must be actively managed."²⁰ Moreover, firms that see acquisitions as a quick way of capturing some financial benefits are often insensitive to the amount of time and effort that is required to implement the merger and to produce superior performance after it occurs. Emphasis on the choice of a merger partner and the terms of the deal can divert focus away from the importance of the activities that occur once the merger is completed.

Or, consider the decision to launch a new product. Whether that decision produces profits or losses is often not simply a matter of the choices made at the time of the launch. It also depends on the implementation of those choices, as well as on subsequent decisions such as redesigning the product, changing the channels of distribution, adjusting prices, and so forth. Yet what we often observe in organizations is that once a decision is made, more effort is expended in assigning credit or blame than in working to improve the results of the decision.

I can think of no example that illustrates my argument as clearly as the story of how Honda entered the American market, first with motorcycles, and later, of course, with automobiles and lawn mowers. Honda established an American subsidiary in 1959, and between 1960 and 1965, Honda's sales in the United

States went from \$500,000 to \$77 million. By 1966, Honda's share of the U.S. motorcycle market was 63%,²¹ starting from zero just seven years before. Honda's share was almost six times that of its closest competitors, Yamaha and Suzuki, and Harley-Davidson's share had fallen to 4%. Pascale showed that this extraordinary success was largely the result of "miscalculation, serendipity, and organizational learning," not of the rational process of planning and foresight often emphasized in our efforts to be successful.²²

Sochiro Honda himself was more interested in racing and engine design than in building a business, but his partner, Takeo Fujisawa, managed to convince him to turn his talent to designing a safe, inexpensive motorcycle to be driven with one hand and used for package delivery in Japan. The motorcycle was an immediate success in Japan. How and why did Honda decide to enter the export market and sell to the United States? Kihachiro Kawashima, eventually president of American Honda, reported to Pascale:

In truth, we had no strategy other than the idea of seeing if we could sell something in the United States. It was a new frontier . . . and it fit the "success against all odds" culture that Mr. Honda had cultivated. I reported my impressions . . . including the seat-of-the-pants target of trying, over several years, to attain a 10 percent share of U.S. imports. . . . We did not discuss profits or deadlines for breakeven.²³

Money was authorized for the venture, but the Ministry of Finance approved a currency allocation of only \$250,000, of which less than half was in cash and the rest in parts and motorcycle inventory. The initial attempt to sell motorcycles in Los Angeles was disastrous. Distances in the United States are much greater than in Japan, and the motor cycles were driven farther and faster than their design permitted. Engine failures were common, particularly on the larger bikes.

The company had initially focused its sales efforts on the larger, 250cc and 350cc bikes, and had not even tried to sell the 50cc Supercub, believing it was too small to have any market acceptance:

We used the Honda 50s . . . to ride around Los Angeles on errands. They attracted a lot of attention. One day we had a call from a Sears buyer. . . . we took note of Sears' interest. But we still hesitated to

push the 50cc bikes out of fear they might harm our image in a heavily macho market. But when the larger bikes started breaking, we had no choice. We let the 50cc bikes move. And surprisingly, the retailers who wanted to sell them weren't motorcycle dealers, they were sporting goods stores.²⁴

Honda's "you meet the nicest people on a Honda" advertising campaign was designed as a class project by a student at UCLA, and was at first resisted by Honda. Honda's distribution strategy—sporting goods and bicycle shops rather than motorcycle dealers—was made *for* them, not *by* them. And its success with the smaller motorbike was almost totally unanticipated. It occurred through a combination of circumstances: the use of the motorbike by Honda employees, who couldn't afford anything fancier; the positive response from people who saw the bike; and the failure of Honda's larger bikes in the American market.

Honda did not use decision analysis and strategic planning. In fact, it is difficult to see that Honda made any decisions at all, at least in terms of developing alternatives and weighing options against an assessment of goals and the state of the market. Honda succeeded by being flexible, by learning and adapting, and by working to have decisions turn out right, once those decisions had been made. Having arrived with the wrong product for a market they did not understand, Honda spent little time trying to find a scapegoat for the company's predicament; rather, Honda personnel worked vigorously to change the situation to their benefit, being creative as well as opportunistic in the process.

The point is that decisions in the world of organizations are not like decisions made in school. There, once you have written down an answer and turned in the test, the game is over. This is not the case in organizational life. The important actions may not be the original choices, but rather what happens subsequently, and what actions are taken to make things work out. This is a significant point because it means that we need to be somewhat less concerned about the quality of the decision at the time we make it (which, after all, we can't really know anyway), and more concerned with adapting our new decisions and actions to the information we learn as events unfold. Just as Honda emerged as a leader in many American markets more by accident and trial-and-error learning than by design,

it is critical that organizational members develop the fortitude to continue when confronted by adversity, and the insight about how to turn situations around. The most important skill may be managing the consequences of decisions. And, in organizations in which it is often difficult to take any action, the critical ability may be the capacity to have things implemented.

WAYS OF GETTING THINGS DONE

Why is implementation difficult in so many organizations, and why does it appear that the ability to get decisions implemented is becoming increasingly rare? One way of thinking about this issue, and of examining the role of power and influence in the implementation process, is to consider some possible ways of getting things done.

One way of getting things to happen is through hierarchical authority. Many people think power is merely the exercise of formal authority, but it is considerably more than that, as we will see. Everyone who works in an organization has seen the exercise of hierarchical authority. Those at higher levels have the power to hire and fire, to measure and reward behavior, and to provide direction to those who are under their aegis. Hierarchical direction is usually seen as legitimate, because the variation in formal authority comes to be taken for granted as a part of organizational life. Thus the phrase, "the boss wants . . ." or "the president wants . . ." is seldom questioned or challenged. Who can forget Marine Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North testifying, during the Iran-contra hearings, about his willingness to stand on his head in a corner if that was what his commander-in-chief wanted, or maintaining that he never once disobeyed the orders of his superiors?

There are three problems with hierarchy as a way of getting things done. First, and perhaps not so important, is that it is badly out of fashion. In an era of rising education and the democratization of all decision processes, in an era in which participative management is advocated in numerous places,²⁵ and particularly in a country in which incidents such as the Vietnam War and Watergate have led many people to mistrust the institutions of authority, implementation by order or command is problematic. Readers who are parents need only reflect on the difference in parental authority between the current period and the 1950s to see

what I mean. How many times have you been able to get your children to do something simply on the basis of your authority as a parent?

A second, more serious problem with authority derives from the fact that virtually all of us work in positions in which, in order to accomplish our job and objectives, we need the cooperation of others who do not fall within our direct chain of command. We depend, in other words, on people outside our purview of authority, whom we could not command, reward, or punish even if we wanted to. Perhaps, as a line manager in a product division, we need the cooperation of people in human resources for hiring, people in finance for evaluating new product opportunities, people in distribution and sales for getting the product sold and delivered, and people in market research for determining product features and marketing and pricing strategy. Even the authority of a chief executive is not absolute, since there are groups outside the focal organization that control the ability to get things done. To sell overseas airline routes to other domestic airlines requires the cooperation of the Transportation and Justice Departments, as well as the acquiescence of foreign governments. To market a drug or medical device requires the approval of the Food and Drug Administration; to export products overseas, one may need both financing and export licenses. The hierarchical authority of all executives and administrators is limited, and for most of us, it is quite limited compared to the scope of what we need in order to do our jobs effectively.

There is a third problem with implementation accomplished solely or primarily through hierarchical authority: what happens if the person at the apex of the pyramid, the one whose orders are being followed, is incorrect? When authority is vested in a single individual, the organization can face grave difficulties if that person's insight or leadership begins to fail. This was precisely what happened at E. F. Hutton, where Robert Fomon, the chief executive officer, ruled the firm through a rigid hierarchy of centralized power:

Fomon's strength as a leader was also his weakness. As he put his stamp on the firm, he did so more as monarch than as a chief executive. . . . Fomon surrounded himself with . . . cronies and yes men who would become the managers and directors of E.F. Hutton and who would insulate him from the real world.²⁶

Because Fomon was such a successful builder of his own hierarchical authority, no one in the firm challenged him to see the new realities that Hutton, and every other securities firm, faced in the 1980s.²⁷ Consequently, when the brokerage industry changed, Hutton did not, and it eventually ceased to exist as an independent entity.

Another way of getting things done is by developing a strongly shared vision or organizational culture. If people share a common set of goals, a common perspective on what to do and how to accomplish it, and a common vocabulary that allows them to coordinate their behavior, then command and hierarchical authority are of much less importance. People will be able to work cooperatively without waiting for orders from the upper levels of the company. Managing through a shared vision and with a strong organizational culture has been a very popular prescription for organizations.²⁸ A number of articles and books tell how to build commitment and shared vision and how to socialize individuals, particularly at the time of entry, so that they share a language, values, and premises about what needs to be done and how to do it.²⁹

Without denying the efficacy and importance of vision and culture, it is important to recognize that implementation accomplished through them can have problems. First, building a shared conception of the world takes time and effort. There are instances when the organization is in crisis or confronts situations in which there is simply not sufficient time to develop shared premises about how to respond. For this very reason, the military services rely not only on techniques that build loyalty and esprit de corps,³⁰ but also on a hierarchical chain of command and a tradition of obeying orders.

Second, there is the problem of how, in a strong culture, new ideas that are inconsistent with that culture can penetrate. A strong culture really constitutes an organizational paradigm, which prescribes how to look at things, what are appropriate methods and techniques for solving problems, and what are the important issues and problems.³¹ In fields of science, a well-developed paradigm provides guidance as to what needs to be taught and in what order, how to do research, what are appropriate methodologies, what are the most pressing research questions, and how to train new students.³² A well-developed paradigm, or a strong culture, is overturned only with great difficulty,

even if it fails to account for data or to lead to new discoveries.³³ In a similar fashion, an organizational paradigm provides a way of thinking about and investigating the world, which reduces uncertainty and provides for effective collective action, but which also overlooks or ignores some lines of inquiry. It is easy for a strong culture to produce groupthink, a pressure to conform to the dominant view.³⁴ A vision focuses attention, but in that focus, things are often left out.

An organization that had difficulties, as well as great success, because of its strong, almost evangelical culture is Apple Computer. Apple was founded and initially largely populated by counterculture computer hackers, whose vision was a computer-based form of power to the people—one computer for each person. IBM had maintained its market share through its close relations with centralized data processing departments. IBM was the safe choice—the saying was, no one ever got fired for buying IBM. The Apple II was successful by making an end run around the corporate data processing manager and selling directly to the end-user, but “by the end of ’82 it was beginning to seem like a good idea to have a single corporate strategy for personal computers, and the obvious person to coordinate that strategy was the data processing manager.”³⁵ Moreover, computers were increasingly being tied into networks; issues of data sharing and compatibility were critical in organizations that planned to buy personal computers by the thousands. Companies wanted a set of computers that could run common software, to save on software purchasing as well as training and programming expenses. Its initial vision of “one person-one machine,” made it difficult for Apple to see the need for compatibility, and as a consequence:

The Apple II wouldn't run software for the IBM PC; the PC wouldn't run software for Lisa, Lisa wouldn't run software for the Apple II; and none of them would run software for the Macintosh. . . . Thanks largely to Steve [Jobs], Apple had an entire family of computers none of which talked to one another.³⁶

Apple's strong culture and common vision also helped cause the failure of the Apple III as a new product. The vision was not only of “one person-one machine,” but also of a machine that anyone could design, modify, and improve. Operating systems stood be-

tween the user and the machine, and so the Apple culture denigrated operating systems: The problem with an operating system, from the hobbyist point of view, was that it made it more difficult to reach down inside the computer and show off your skills; it formed a barrier between the user and the machine. Personal computers meant power to the people, and operating systems took some of that power away. . . . It wasn't a design issue; it was a threat to the inalienable rights of a free people.³⁷

Apple III had an operating system known as SOS for Sophisticated Operating System, which was actually quite similar to the system Microsoft had developed for IBM's personal computer—MS DOS (Microsoft Disk Operating System), except it was even better in some respects. Yet Apple was too wary of operating systems to try to make its system *the* standard, or even *a* standard, in personal computing. As a result the company lost out on a number of important commercial opportunities. The very zeal and fervor that made working for Apple like a religious crusade and produced extraordinary levels of commitment from the work force made it difficult for the company to be either cognizant of or responsive to shifts in the marketplace for personal computers.

There is a third process of implementation in organizations—namely, the use of power and influence. With power and influence the emphasis is on method rather than structure. It is possible to wield power and influence without necessarily having or using formal authority. Nor is it necessary to rely on a strong organizational culture and the homogeneity that this often implies. Of course, the process of implementation through power and influence is not without problems of its own. What is important is to see power and influence as one of a set of ways of getting things done—not the only way, but an important way.

From the preceding discussion we can see that implementation is becoming more difficult because: (1) changing social norms and greater interdependence within organizations have made traditional, formal authority less effective than it once was, and (2) developing a common vision is increasingly difficult in organizations composed of heterogeneous members—heterogeneous in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, and even language and culture. At the same time, our ambivalence about power, and the fact that training in its use is far from widespread, mean that members of

organizations are often unable to supplement their formal authority with the "unofficial" processes of power and influence. As a result their organizations suffer, and promising projects fail to get off the ground. This is why learning how to manage with power is so important.

THE MANAGEMENT PROCESS: A POWER PERSPECTIVE

From the perspective of power and influence, the process of implementation involves a set of steps, which are outlined below.

- Decide what your goals are, what you are trying to accomplish.
- Diagnose patterns of dependence and interdependence; what individuals are influential and important in your achieving your goal?
- What are their points of view likely to be? How will they feel about what you are trying to do?
- What are their power bases? Which of them is more influential in the decision?
- What are your bases of power and influence? What bases of influence can you develop, to gain more control over the situation?
- Which of the various strategies and tactics for exercising power seem most appropriate and are likely to be effective, given the situation you confront?
- Based on the above, choose a course of action to get something done.

The first step is to decide on your goals. It is, for instance, easier to drive from Albany, New York, to Austin, Texas, if you know your destination than if you just get in your car in Albany and drive randomly. Although this point is apparently obvious it is something that is often overlooked in a business context. How many times have you attended meetings or conferences or talked to someone on the telephone without a clear idea of what you were trying to accomplish? Our calendars are filled with appointments, and other interactions occur unexpectedly in the course of our day. If we don't have some clear goals, and if we don't know

what our primary objectives are, it is not very likely that we are going to achieve them. One of the themes Tom Peters developed early in his writing was the importance of consistency in purpose. Having the calendars, knowing the language, what gets measured, and what gets talked about—all focus on what the organization is trying to achieve.³⁸ It is the same with individuals; to the extent that each interaction, in each meeting, in each conference, is oriented toward the same objective, the achievement of that objective is more likely.

Once you have a goal in mind, it is necessary to diagnose who is important in getting your goal accomplished. You must determine the patterns of dependence and interdependence among these people and find out how they are likely to feel about what you are trying to do. As part of this diagnosis, you also need to know how events are likely to unfold, and to estimate the role of power and influence in the process. In getting things accomplished, it is critical to have a sense of the game being played, the players, and what their positions are. One can get badly injured playing football in a basketball uniform, or not knowing the offense from the defense. I have seen, all too often, otherwise intelligent and successful managers have problems because they did not recognize the political nature of the situation, or because they were blindsided by someone whose position and strength they had not anticipated.

Once you have a clear vision of the game, it is important to ascertain the power bases of the other players, as well as your own potential and actual sources of power. In this way you can determine your relative strength, along with the strength of other players. Understanding the sources of power is critical in diagnosing what is going to happen in an organization, as well as in preparing yourself to take action.

Finally, you will want to consider carefully the various strategies, or, to use a less grand term, the tactics that are available to you, as well as those that may be used by others involved in the process. These tactics help in using power and influence effectively, and can also help in countering the use of power by others.

Power is defined here as the potential ability to influence behavior, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things that they would not otherwise do.³⁹ Politics and influ-

ence are the processes, the actions, the behaviors through which this potential power is utilized and realized.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN, TO MANAGE WITH POWER?

First, it means recognizing that in almost every organization, there are varying interests. This suggests that one of the first things we need to do is to diagnose the political landscape and figure out what the relevant interests are, and what important political subdivisions characterize the organization. It is essential that we do not assume that everyone necessarily is going to be our friend, or agree with us, or even that preferences are uniformly distributed. There are clusters of interests within organizations, and we need to understand where these are and to whom they belong.

Next, it means figuring out what point of view these various individuals and subunits have on issues of concern to us. It also means understanding why they have the perspective that they do. It is all too easy to assume that those with a different perspective are somehow not as smart as we are, not as informed, not as perceptive. If that is our belief, we are likely to do several things, each of which is disastrous. First, we may act contemptuously toward those who disagree with us—after all, if they aren't as competent or as insightful as we are, why should we take them seriously? It is rarely difficult to get along with those who resemble us in character and opinions. The real secret of success in organizations is the ability to get those who differ from us, and whom we don't necessarily like, to do what needs to be done. Second, if we think people are misinformed, we are likely to "inform" them, or to try to convince them with facts and analysis. Sometimes this will work, but often it will not, for their disagreement may not be based on a lack of information; it may, instead, arise from a different perspective on what our information means. Diagnosing the point of view of interest groups as well as the basis for their positions will assist us in negotiating with them in predicting their response to various initiatives.

Third, managing with power means understanding that to get things done, you need power—more

power than those whose opposition you must overcome—and thus it is imperative to understand where power comes from and how these sources of power can be developed. We are sometimes reluctant to think very purposefully or strategically about acquiring and using power. We are prone to believe that if we do our best, work hard, be nice, and so forth, things will work out for the best. I don't mean to imply that one should not, in general, work hard, try to make good decisions, and be nice, but that these and similar platitudes are often not very useful in helping us get things accomplished in our organizations. We need to understand power and try to get it. We must be willing to do things to build our sources of power, or else we will be less effective than we might wish to be.

Fourth, managing with power means understanding the strategies and tactics through which power is developed and used in organizations, including the importance of timing, the use of structure, the social psychology of commitment and other forms of interpersonal influence. If nothing else, such an understanding will help us become astute observers of the behavior of others. The more we understand power and its manifestations, the better will be our clinical skills. More fundamentally, we need to understand strategies and tactics of using power so that we can consider the range of approaches available to us, and use what is likely to be effective. Again, as in the case of building sources of power, we often try not to think about these things, and we avoid being strategic or purposeful about employing our power. This is a mis take. Although we may have various qualms, there will be others who do not. Knowledge without power is of remarkably little use. And power without the skill to employ it effectively is likely to be wasted.

Managing with power means more than knowing the ideas discussed in this article. It means being, like Henry Ford, willing to do something with that knowledge. It requires political savvy to get things done, and the willingness to force the issue. For years in the United States, there had been demonstrations and protests, court decisions and legislative proposals attempting to end the widespread discrimination against minority Americans in employment, housing, and public accommodations. The passage of civil rights legislation was a top priority for President Kennedy, but al-

though he had charisma, he lacked the knowledge of political tactics, and possibly the will to use some of the more forceful ones, to get his legislation passed. In the hands of someone who knew power and influence inside out, in spite of the opposition of Southern congressmen and senators, the legislation would be passed quickly.

In March 1965, the United States was wracked by violent reactions to civil rights marches in the South. People were killed and injured as segregationists attacked demonstrators, with little or no intervention by the local law enforcement agencies. There were demonstrators across from the White House holding a vigil as Lyndon Johnson left to address a joint session of Congress. This was the same Lyndon Johnson who, in 1948, had opposed federal antilynching legislation, arguing that it was a matter properly left to the states. This was the same Lyndon Johnson who, as a young congressional secretary and then congressman, had talked conservative to conservatives, liberal to liberals, and was said by many to have stood for nothing. This was the same Lyndon Johnson who in eight years in the House of Representatives had introduced not one piece of significant legislation and had done almost nothing to speak out on issues of national importance. This was the same Lyndon Johnson who, instead, had used some of his efforts while in the House to enrich himself by influencing colleagues at the Federal Communications Commission to help him obtain a radio station in Austin, Texas, and then to change the operating license so the station would become immensely profitable and valuable. This was the same Lyndon Johnson who, in 1968, having misled the American people, would decide not to run for reelection because of his association with both the Vietnam War and a fundamental distrust of the presidency. On that night Johnson was to make vigorous use of his power and his political skill to help the civil rights movement:

With almost the first words of his speech, the audience . . . knew that Lyndon Johnson intended to take the cause of civil rights further than it had ever gone before. . . . He would submit a new civil rights bill . . . and it would be far stronger than the bills of the past. . . . "their cause must be our cause, too," Lyndon Johnson said. "Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must over-

come the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. . . . And we shall overcome."⁴⁰

As he left the chamber after making his speech, Johnson sought out the 76-year-old chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Emmanuel Celler:

"Manny," he said, "I want you to start hearings tonight."

"Mr. President," Celler protested, "I can't push that committee or it might get out of hand. I am scheduling hearings for next week.

. . . Johnson's eyes narrowed, and his face turned harder. His right hand was still shaking Celler's, but the left hand was up, and a finger was out, pointing, jabbing.

"Start them *this* week, Manny," he said. "And hold night sessions, too."⁴¹

Getting things done requires power. The problem is that we would prefer to see the world as a kind of grand morality play, with the good guys, and the bad ones easily identified. Obtaining power is not always an attractive process, nor is its use. And it somehow disturbs our sense of symmetry that a man who was as sleazy, to use a term of my students, as Lyndon Johnson was in some respects, was also the individual who almost single-handedly passed more civil rights legislation in less time with greater effect than anyone else in U.S. history. We are troubled by the issue of means and ends. We are perplexed by the fact that "bad" people sometimes do great and wonderful things, and that "good" people sometimes do "bad" things, or often, nothing at all. Every day, managers in public and private organizations acquire and use power to get things done. Some of these things may be, in retrospect, mistakes, although often that depends heavily on your point of view. Any reader who always does the correct thing that pleases everyone should immediately contact me—we will get very wealthy together. Mistakes and opposition are inevitable. What is not inevitable is passivity, not trying, not seeking to accomplish things.

In many domains of activity we have become so obsessed with not upsetting anybody, and with not making mistakes, that we settle for doing nothing. Rather than rebuild San Francisco's highways, possibly in the wrong place, maybe even in the wrong way, we do nothing, and the city erodes economically with-

out adequate transportation. Rather than possibly being wrong about a new product, such as the personal computer, we study it and analyze it, and lose market opportunities. Analysis and forethought are, obviously, fine. What is not so fine is paralysis or inaction, which arises because we have little skill in overcoming the opposition that inevitably accompanies change, and little interest in doing so.

Theodore Roosevelt, making a speech at the Sorbonne in 1910, perhaps said it best:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumphs of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.⁴²

It is easy and often comfortable to feel powerless—to say, "I don't know what to do, I don't have the power to get it done, and besides, I can't really stomach the struggle that may be involved." It is easy, and now quite common, to say, when confronted with some mistakes in your organization, "It's not really my responsibility, I can't do anything about it anyway, and if the company wants to do that, well that's why the senior executives get the big money—it's their responsibility." Such a response excuses us from trying to do things; in not trying to overcome opposition, we will make fewer enemies and are less likely to embarrass ourselves. It is, however, a prescription for both organizational and personal failure. This is why power and influence are not the organization's last dirty secret, but the secret of success for both individuals and their organizations. Innovation and change in almost any arena requires the skill to develop power, and the willingness to employ it to get things accomplished.

Or, in the words of a local radio newscaster, "If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own."

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