

Information power
Access to and control over
important information.

3 Understand the ethical use of power.

Using Power Ethically

Referent power is linked with organizational effectiveness. It is the most dangerous power, however, because it can be too extensive and intensive in affecting the behavior of others. Charismatic leaders need an accompanying sense of responsibility for others. The late disabled actor Christopher Reeve's referent power made him a powerful spokesperson for research on spinal injuries and stem cell research.

Expert power has been called the power of the future.¹¹ Of the five forms of power, it has the strongest relationship with performance and satisfaction. Through expert power that vital skills, abilities, and knowledge are passed on within the organization. Employees internalize what they observe and learn from managers they perceive to be experts.

The results on the effectiveness of these five forms of power pose a challenge for organizations. The least effective power bases—legitimate, reward, and coercive—are the ones most likely to be used by managers.¹²

Managers inherit these power bases as part of the position when they take a supervisory job. By contrast, the most effective power bases—referent and expert—are ones that must be developed and strengthened through interpersonal relationships with employees. Marissa Mayer, vice president of search products and experience at Google, is well respected and liked by her colleagues. She is described as someone with a lot of technical knowledge, and she is comfortable in social environments. This represents her expert power and referent power—she has an advanced degree in computer science from Stanford University and is known for her ability to connect with people. At thirty-six years of age, she has already had a successful career at Google¹³ and is ranked 42 in 2010 on *Fortune's* 50 most powerful people in the world.¹⁴

Managers can work at developing all five of these forms of power for future use. The key to using them well is using them ethically, as shown in Table 11.1. Power has its advantages. Powerful people are more likely to get their way during conflict at work;¹⁵ thus, power must be used carefully. Coercive power, for example, requires careful administration if it is to be used in an ethical manner. Employees should be informed of the rules in advance, and any punishment should be used consistently, uniformly, and privately. The key to using all types of interpersonal power ethically is to be sensitive to employees' concerns and to communicate well.

To French and Raven's five power sources, we can add another source that is very important in today's organizations. **Information power** is access to and control over important information. Consider, for example, the CEO's administrative assistant. He or she has information about the CEO's schedule that people need if they are going to see the CEO. Central to the idea of information power is the person's position, both formal and informal, within an organization's communication. Also important is the idea of framing, which is the "spin" that managers put on information. Managers not only pass information on to subordinates but also interpret this information and influence the subordinates' perceptions of it. Information power not only occurs in the downward direction but may also flow upward from subordinates to managers. In manufacturing plants, database operators often control information about plant metrics and shipping performance that is vital to managerial decision making. Information power can also flow laterally. Salespersons convey information