Chapter 6
Power, Authority, and Influence

We see people exercising power every day. A policeman puts up a hand and traffic stops. A professor assigns a homework exercise and the students complete it. The baseball manager tells the pitcher to leave the game and the pitcher leaves. It is often difficult to know exactly *why* a particular person has power, or exactly *what* it is (s)he has. But there is no problem recognizing its consequences; things are done the way the power-holder wants them to be done, even when others would like them done differently. The drivers would rather not waste time, the students would rather not do the homework, the pitcher would rather stay in the game, but, in each case, they do as they are told. The power-holder is the one who does the telling.

Many people are somewhat uneasy talking about power in this straight-forward way. After all, our society is based on ideas about the equality of individuals, and there seems something wrong with some people being "more equal" than others. We think that in organizations decisions should be made by cool, rational analysis. When they are not, we complain about "office politics," by which we generally mean that power, rather than reason, was used in making the decision. Because engineers and scientists hold strong professional values toward rational analysis, they tend to be particularly upset at decisions they see as "political." We shall see in this chapter that viewing power as the dirty side of organizations is a mistake. Without power differentials, organizations could scarcely operate at all; and the way power is allocated has a rationality all its own. Power is necessary and useful. Our aim here is to understand something of where power comes from, who gets it and how, and how it is used.

SOURCES OF POWER

The first thing to notice about power is that it is not a property of an individual, but of a relationship. You can give all the orders you like but, if no one obeys them, you have no power. The power of your signature on a check is limited to what you have in your bank account. One useful way to look at power is to ask why the person on the receiving end does what the power-holder wishes. A useful set of categories is suggested by French and Raven (1959), who suggest five different resources that give power to those who hold them.

Reward Power

The most obvious reason for us to obey someone else is that (s)he can give us something we want if we obey, or withhold it if we disobey. This involves a fairly explicit "if-then" promise: "*If* you're quiet, *then* I'll

buy you an ice cream"; "*If* you answer all the problems, *then* I'll give you an A"; "*If* you exceed last month's production, *then* I'll give you a bonus." In each case, the use of reward power involves a promise about the future, and the promise has to be believed for the process to work. The reward must also be conditional on obedience. We have to believe both "if, then" and "if not, then not." A bonus for high production works only if average or low production produces no bonus.

Coercive Power

The mirror-image of reward power is coercive or punishment power. We obey someone because (s)he can punish us if we do not. The promise here is "unless, then." "*Unless* you exceed last month's production, I'll fire you." Rewards and punishments are often lumped together under the term "sanctions," which can be either positive (reward) or negative (punishments). There are, however, important differences between rewards and punishments. Being rewarded for doing something will generally make us like both the person doing the rewarding and the activity being rewarded. Being punished for not doing something will tend to have the opposite effects; we end up hating both the job *and* the boss. Consequently, we think about quitting (if we can find another job). Hence coercive power can only be effective if there are side constraints to prevent the person punished from leaving the scene. A professor may be able to use coercive power in required courses, but if (s)he tries it in elective courses, half the class may drop the course. (See also the earlier comments on punishment in Chapter 4.)

It is worth noting that many, perhaps most, of the rewards and punishments we see used in everyday life are more symbolic (praise, disapproval) than primary (food, money). Most of us respond as quickly to the professor's approving nod, or a boss's disapproving frown, as we do to tangible consequences like getting an "A" or being fired. This is valuable for the power-holder, because these sanctions are less prone to being used up than are the primary sanctions. Few supervisors can afford to give bonuses to, or to fire, their entire work groups. They can, however, praise or reprimand their subordinates without fear of running out of words. Power-holders thus tend to prefer symbolic to primary sanctions. Whether or not these nonprimary sanctions will work depends on the context in which they are used, the relationship between boss and subordinate. Aspects of this relationship and context form the basis for French and Raven's other three classes of power base.

Legitimate Power

One of the commonest, but also most complex, power bases is implied when we explain our obedience in terms such as "ought to" or "has a

right to." We obey a police officer directing traffic because we feel that (s)he "has a right to" direct traffic. We obey our boss because we feel that we "ought to." Indeed, we may not even explain it that far: we just explain our obedience by saying, "Well, (s)he *is* the boss," leaving implicit the argument that one ought to obey bosses (or parents or police officers or professors). We do not calculate the chance of rewards or punishments, we just obey because it seems like the right thing to do. Legitimate power of this sort is what is specifically meant by "authority"—the person is "authorized" to give orders, and we accept that authority.

Where does this feeling of acceptance come from? It seems to be deeply rooted in our upbringing and our experiences of our culture, in what is referred to as our "socialization." We are not taught these values explicitly. We just absorb them, in the same way that we absorb all sorts of other cultural values, from acceptable ways of using a knife and fork to "proper" ways of behaving toward our elders, peers, and juniors. No one has to explain to most of us that we should be quiet at a symphony concert, although being loud at a rock concert is perfectly all right. Similarly, we just seem to absorb the idea, from a lifetime's experience, that it is legitimate to obey people in certain positions, at least in particular matters. We accept their authority as "legitimate."

Three points are particularly worth keeping in mind about legitimate power. One is that it attaches to the role or position, not just to the person. It is not necessary that our boss be outstandingly pleasant or clever, or use rewards and punishments skillfully. We obey because (s)he is the boss, and obeying the boss is legitimate. (Of course, there are exceptions. If our boss got the job by nepotism—by being the owner's relative—we may feel that the appointment itself was illegitimate, and accept the boss's orders less willingly. That is, accepting the boss's legitimacy is a part of accepting the legitimacy of the whole system.)

A second interesting feature of legitimate power is the range of subtle cues that are used to establish it. When signing an official order, the holder of legitimate power will tend to use the job title: Joe Blow, *President;* Mary Rowe, *Chief Engineer.* Indeed, the person's name is often dropped altogether, and the order carries only the person's title or position. Memos come "from the desk of," as if we were to obey a piece of furniture! Uniforms seem to work in the same way. If the person holding up a hand in front of my car wears a police uniform, I obey the command; if not, I may ignore the command. Only *uniformed* mail carriers are allowed to put things into your mailbox. Note also how carefully the legitimacy of uniforms is guarded. It is an offense to dress as a police officer if you are not one. In time of war, someone captured behind enemy lines is treated either as a spy or as a prisoner of war, depending on whether or not (s)he is wearing the appropriate uniform.

Finally, it is worth noting how subtly most of us have learned the rules about just what the limits on legitimate authority are. For example, most students will obey a professor who tells them to do certain embarrassing things (such as standing in front of the class) but not others (taking off their clothes). It is all right for the boss to instruct us on work-related matters, and even on matters only loosely related to work such as style of clothing, but it would be wrong for the boss to attempt to influence whom we marry or where we live. There were recently a number of lawsuits about whether or not it was legitimate for a boss to ask his or her secretary to make and serve coffee. Such things are rarely covered by the job description, but we all have strong feelings about where the line between legitimate and illegitimate orders falls.

Legitimate power is both the commonest and the subtlest of everyday power types. It turns on a common internalized sense that certain people, in certain positions, have a right to give orders about certain matters. We grant authority to position-holders, without questioning their right to give orders of certain kinds, as long as they are behaving in their roles (in uniform, etc.). The limits on these roles are rarely spelled out, but we still have clear understandings of where the limits fall.

Referent Power

The technical term "referent" is here used in the same sense as in "reference group," a group with which one feels a sense of identity, a feeling of being one with its members. Referent power is based on one's attraction to, or identification with, another individual. It might loosely be called the "my hero" effect: I like or admire this person, so I try to behave or believe as (s)he does. I do not need any explicit order or instruction. The merest suggestion, or even just my guess, as to what this person wants is enough for me to start behaving in that way.

Referent power is close to what is often referred to as "charisma," a special personal gift for inspiring others. The word is probably over-used; we see everyone from successful football coaches to successful car salespeople described as charismatic. There are, however, many historical examples of people of great influence who seem to have had this inspirational quality: religious leaders such as Christ or Muhammad; political leaders such as Winston Churchill or John Kennedy (or in an evil way, Adolf Hitler). These people seem to have possessed referent power on a vast scale, inspiring nations in extraordinary ways. We can also see referent power at work, on a much smaller scale, in our everyday lives.

Note that while legitimate power is attached specifically to the person's role or position, referent power is specific to the person. It is this particular person, not as chief engineer or research director,

whom I find myself trying to emulate. I read the same journals, dress like, and try to see problems as (s)he would. If that person leaves, and is replaced by someone I feel less identified with, the whole basis of my compliance changes.

Referent power is thus difficult for an organization to use. On the one hand, it produces very powerful effects around the person who has it, and uses none of the organization's resources of bonus payments and other rewards or punishments. On the other hand, it is hard to predict and control. You cannot *require* an employee to be charismatic, or fire someone for not being so! Because the power is lodged in the person, it may be used to ends the organization does not want. After all, successful revolutionaries often seem to have the personal qualities needed for great referent power. A revolutionary may inspire a research group toward a brilliant scientific breakthrough; but could just as easily lead the group off to a competitor's laboratory! From the organization's perspective, people with strong referent power can be a double-edged sword.

Expert power

The last of the five power bases we shall examine is that of expertise. When a doctor tells you, "Take two of these pills every morning," you obey because you trust the doctor's expertise, not because (s)he is your boss, or your hero, or can reward or punish you. When the lab assistant explains how to connect a particular instrument, you obey for similar reasons. One takes instructions from lawyers in legal matters, from cooks about cooking, and from local residents about street directions, all for the same reason: they are experts who have knowledge you do not.

Like referent power, expertise power can pose problems for organizations. Your boss (whose power is legitimate) tells you to solve a particular design problem one way, but a subordinate (a leading expert in the matter) tells you that way will not work, and the problem should be approached quite differently. Whom shall you listen to? In simpler times the confict was perhaps less likely to arise. The boss would also be a master craftsman, combining legitimacy and expertise. In advanced science and technology fields, however, the conflict is common. Junior people are very often experts in particular specialties. This has important implications for the way organizations can be designed and run, as we shall see later in chapter 10.

AN EXAMPLE: HOW JUNIOR EMPLOYEES GET POWER

Understanding the differences between these five power bases—reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert—and their implications

can help us to understand what power we have over others, and vice versa. In most cases power comes from some mixture of the five bases, and the effectiveness of particular mixtures may not be obvious. We have all come across people who, although officially "the boss," have little or no real power. More interestingly, one can often find people who are actually quite powerful, although from their official position in the organization one would not expect them to be. The boss's secretary, the custodian, or the clerk who checks travel expenses often turn out to be powerful, despite their low job titles and pay rates. How can this be?

An interesting analysis of this question is given by David Mechanic (1962). He shows that low-ranking employees can acquire considerable power by such means as:

1. **Expertise:** If the lab assistant is the only person who knows how to fix a balky piece of equipment, even senior researchers have to deal carefully with him or her. For example, they have to fit their work around the assistant's schedule, rather than vice versa. This power is still more important if the expertise is critical and the expert is hard to replace.

2. **Effort:** In a university, most professors cannot be bothered with the work of ordering supplies or scheduling classes. One of the secretaries may take on the job, and thereby acquire considerable power over the professors, because they either go along with the secretary's wishes or do the work themselves.

3. **Attractiveness:** Attractiveness, or charisma, is a power resource. There is no reason to expect that it follows organizational level, so it is available to both junior and senior employees.

4. **Position:** Mail-room employees and switchboard operators are at the center of important communication networks, and thus acquire a power base. By deciding which calls go through, which are asked to hold, the switchboard operator can make the senior person's job much easier—or harder. Because they know what is going on, mailroom clerks are valuable people to know in the organization. Not all important information flows through official channels, and it can be very useful to know in advance when a particular meeting is to be scheduled or a particular decision made.

5. **Coalitions:** I tend to be somewhat absent-minded about the administrative details of professoring, and am, as a result, often caught with overdue grade sheets, lost travel receipts, etc. One of the women in my department knows how such things can be fixed—*and* she knows who can fix them, since she has a network of friends around the campus, and they do small favors for one another. Not surprisingly, she is a powerful person in my life!

6. **Rules:** Like most large organizations, my university has a huge rule book. I am totally ignorant of many of the rules. The people who can tell me about the rules, and how to get around them, are important to me.

Hence, Mechanic shows how a careful exploration of who really commands the various power bases can improve our understanding of where the power lies in organizations. A lab assistant, although he or she has little legitimate power, may be quite powerful as a result of another power base, such as expertise, effective control over important resources, effective ways of getting something done, or ways around the official system. The analysis reminds us that it is always a good idea to make sure you get on well with the support staff. It also suggests several ways in which you can use your own opportunities to acquire some power, even as a junior employee.

POWER IN THE ORGANIZATION

How Departments Get Power

So far we have discussed power mainly in the context of two individuals, the power-holder and the power-target. We now expand the discussion to consider how power is distributed within the organization. In most organizations, some departments are clearly more powerful than others, even though they may be shown as equals on the organization chart. How do such power inequalities come about? Are they a result of "mere politics" or is there something more interesting about them? We shall look at both these questions in this section.

An example will help the discussion. Consider the case of an imaginary firm manufacturing domestic appliances such as clothes washers and driers, refrigerators, and ranges. Its basic organizational structure is shown in Figure 6.1. Five vice presidents report to the president: VP Manufacturing, who supervises the metal forming, electrical, and assembly and test divisions; VP Sales and Marketing, in charge of a domestic and an overseas division; VP Development, who supervises an R&D laboratory and a product development division; VP Employee Relations, who supervises the industrial relations and personnel divisions; and VP Finance and Accounting, who supervises these two divisions. Other corporate staff functions reporting to the president include the office of corporate counsel (legal matters) and the office of computing services.

Let us drop in on an important meeting of the corporate planning group—the president and the five vice presidents. VP Development has

Figure 6.1.   Organization Chart for a Domestic Appliance Company
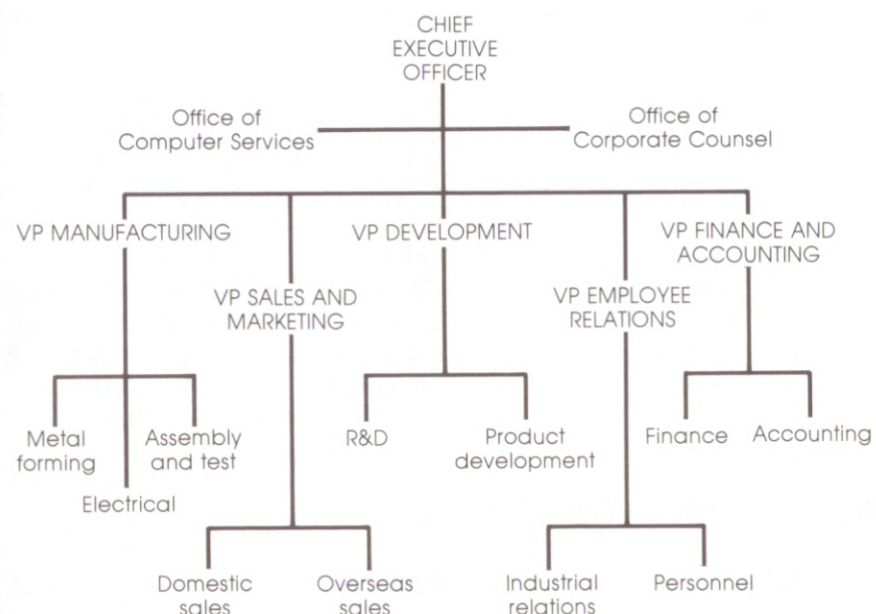
just reported the results of tests of a new product his group has been working on for some time, a microwave oven, which he is arguing should be added to the present product line. The other VPs have strong views on the matter. VP Sales and Marketing is strongly in favor: the company needs a glamorous new product to liven up their range and give them a "high technology" image. VP Manufacturing is strongly opposed: he already has enough trouble meeting current production schedules. His difficulties will multiply if he adds a new product that he sees as not ready yet for full-scale production, and that involves novel technologies with which his division is not familiar. VP Finance and Accounting is uneasy about raising the money for the new capital equipment the new oven will require. Finally, VP Employee Relations is worried that hiring workers with the right skills for the new product will be difficult and costly, and may distort the new wage and salary structure her group has been working on for the past two years. It is going to be a long meeting!

Note, first, that there is nothing underhand or malicious about the characters in the situation we have sketched. The five VPs are all highly competent at their jobs, and all are interested in the company's success. The disagreement arises because each of them emphasizes,

quite properly, the effects of the decision on his or her division. The decision is important, complex, and highly uncertain as to results. There is no obviously rational, analytical way of making it. We do not need to invent any self-seeking or empire-building motivations for the VPs to know that serious disagreement will occur. It is highly likely that when all the arguing and number-crunching is done, the decision on the microwave oven will be importantly influenced by the relative power of the planning group participants.

According to the organization chart, all five are at the same level, and thus equally powerful. However, this is most unlikely to be true in practice: some will be more powerful than others. Can we predict which VPs will be more powerful, which less? Perhaps we can, but only if we know a little more about the company's history. For example, consider these three alternative scenarios:

1. Suppose the company has a history of costly strikes. Two years ago, a key group of skilled workers struck, stopping production for four months. They finally accepted a 30 percent wage increase, making them the highest-paid hourly employees in the company. The other hourly workers bitterly resented this, and have been on the verge of striking since. The new wage and salary structure the VP Employee Relations has been working on is intended to resolve some of these problems. With this history, we would predict that the vote of VP Employee Relations would be weighed heavily in deciding on the new microwave oven. She, in short, would acquire significant additional power.

2. Suppose the company, because of the excellent quality of its products, has always enjoyed a good reputation with consumers. Despite a number of plant expansions it has always had trouble meeting demand, and the sales department has had to impose a quota on its dealers. The products virtually sell themselves, and sales is always pressing manufacturing to increase production. VP Manufacturing, who rose through the ranks of production engineering, has always insisted on careful inspection and quality control, often putting these ahead of production quantity. With this history, we would predict that VP Manufacturing would carry considerable power in influencing the microwave oven decision.

3. A few years ago the company marketed a new refrigerator with poorly placed cooling coils. Sometimes a joint in the coils leaked when the refrigerator was pushed back against a wall, releasing a poisonous coolant. Two customers died, a dozen were seriously injured, and the company is facing multimillion dollar lawsuits for damages. Given this history, we would expect the planning group might well be expanded to include the senior attorney from the office of corporate counsel, and

that (s)he would have a very influential voice in the microwave oven decision.

Strategic Contingencies Theory

What these three examples suggest is a version of what is known as the "strategic contingencies" theory of organizational power (Hickson et al., 1971; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1974). This theory argues that all organizations face a fairly small number of problems that are both (a) important (i.e., strategic, not tactical) and (2) highly uncertain (i.e., not only complex, but difficult to predict and solve). The functions in the organizations that deal with these problems acquire power, and are able to mobilize the organization's resources to deal with them. Thus, in the first example, *labor problems* were the major "strategic contingency," and the employee relations function, which dealt with those problems, gained power. In the second example, *production* was the critical problem, giving power to VP Manufacturing. When the central problem is legal, as in the third example above, lawyers gain influence.

All this sounds perfectly simple and sensible, as it is. What is worth noting is that this theory gives a less self-serving perspective on the whole issue of organizational power. If power distributions actually work this way (and there is evidence that they often do), power becomes a key mechanism in lining up the organization with the world it actually lives in. If relative power in the planning group were distributed by some other rule—for example, the seniority of the respective VPs, or the size of their budgets—then influence over key decisions would not necessarily reflect anything about how important the various considerations are. What strategic contingencies theory offers is a way of allocating, and shifting over time, the power of different organizational functions. It shifts power so as to give more to those functions that deal with the organization's most pressing problems. What could be more sensible?

There are two closely related reasons why things do not always work this smoothly. First, power is not a precision instrument, with individuals and departments gaining only the power that allows them to deal with the specific critical problem. Power acquired by having critical-problem skills can also be used to influence other matters. Second, since most people would rather have more power than less, they will tend to use the power they have (a flexible tool) to preserve and expand their power. These two factors tend to "freeze" power distributions that might fit one set of problems, even after the critical problems have changed and a new power distribution is required.

Consider again the third example discussed above, where the critical problem was a huge product liability suit, and the legal department

gained in power. The head of the legal department gained an influential voice in the corporate planning group, because (s)he was able to deal with the company's critical problem. With this new power, (s)he is likely to ask for full membership in the planning group, implying promotion to full vice president status. This, in turn, would plausibly lead to expansion of the legal department into a full-blown division, with an increased budget. Given the importance of legal matters to the company, lawyers from this division would be appointed to other important committees, such as the new products group or the employee relations committee. Little by little, lawyers start to appear at all the key points in the company and become a force to be reckoned with. From their original base (ability to deal with the product liability suit), they are now influential in many other decisions—including, critically, decisions as to who becomes influential! The power of the legal function has become "institutionalized."

Again, this is not necessarily just a cynical power-grab. As we saw earlier, lawyers tend to see problems in legal terms, just as engineers tend to see them in engineering terms, and accountants in accounting terms. Problems do not generally announce themselves as "critical." Someone has to see them that way, and convince others about it. With lawyers on the key committees, legal aspects of problems tend to become more widely recognized as critical. Because they are problems only lawyers can solve, the lawyers' power increases again. Even without self-interested empire building, power tends to be self-amplifying and self-perpetuating. Power distributions thus have a tendency to reflect yesterday's "critical contingencies" for the organization, not necessarily today's or tomorrow's.

USING POWER: TARGETS, STRENGTHS, AND LIMITS

Thus far we have been mainly concerned with how people and groups in organizations come to have power. McCall (1979) has pointed out that power is largely a matter of being in the right place, at the right time, with the right resources, and doing the right thing. What we have tried to do so far is to enrich this summary statement and to show in concrete terms some of the main ways in which power arises. We now turn briefly to some of the issues that arise in using power.

First, who and what is the target? Very different power tactics are needed to influence a specific behavior of one specific individual on one specific occasion than to influence a broad class of behaviors, for a group of people, over a long period of time. For the first, a single verbal instruction may suffice. For the second, some more economical way of

using power, for example, standing orders or standard operating procedures, is needed. Similarly, an effort to change on particular decision of a committee will need different tactics than if the aim is to change the kinds of decisions the committee makes. For the first purpose, I might try to persuade a majority of the current members to accept my point of view; for the second, changing the membership of the committee to include more of my allies might be more effective.

An interesting range of such power tactics was found by George Strauss (1962) in his study of how purchasing agents acquire and use power in a company. These tactics are particularly interesting because the purchasing agents he studied dealt primarily with other departments in the organization at the same hierarchical level—production scheduling, quality control, engineering, etc. The agents thus had to deal with the conflicts that came up by means of lateral relationships with these other departments. They had no hierarchical authority to call on. Their primary tasks were to negotiate with suppliers outside the firm and to keep on top of deliveries. Because the specifications, quality, and delivery times of the materials they bought were important to other departments, a variety of conflicts commonly came up. For example, production scheduling might submit a requisition with an unusually short delivery date, requiring the purchasing agent either to harass suppliers with whom he needs to maintain good relationships or to resist the demand in some way. Strauss found five common tactics the agents used in resisting demands:

1. **Using rules.** If there is a standing rule about minimum lead times, the agent might invoke this. If not, he might ask for justification in writing, or ask the ordering department to pay for extra costs (such as air-freight charges).

2. **Evading rules.** The agent might "go through the motions" of trying to get speedy delivery, but not really try; or might even just ignore the requisition (a breach of the rules, but often hard for the ordering department to do anything about).

3. **Personal/political.** The agent might use friendships, or promises of future favors, either directly with the ordering department or indirectly through other departments, to get the request modified.

4. **Educational/persuasive.** The agent might try direct persuasion to convince the ordering department that the request was unreasonable. Less directly, he might try to get the same effect by, for example, getting the ordering department boss to sit in on discussions with the supplier, to see what difficulties were being made.

5. **Organizational.** The agent might try to get the requisition procedure changed (e.g., to require prior approval of purchasing for all requisitions) or even attempt to change the organization's structure (e.g.,

integrating both purchasing and scheduling into a "materials" department).

As we have noted, these tactics are often very effective. We do not need to assume that the purchasing agents were selfish, malicious, or power hungry. What most of them seemed to be doing was using the power resources available to keep their departments working smoothly by buffering them from excessive outside influences. Certainly, some empire building and status climbing was going on, but there was also a good bit of give and take, covering of genuine emergencies, and effort to make the department run well. The agents used their power both for good and otherwise, but they certainly found ways to acquire it, and were subtle about how they used it.

One of the things we can learn from such studies is that any single form of power has strengths and weaknesses when we come to use it. French and Raven's five bases of personal power—reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert—provide numerous examples. Reward and coercive power, for example, tend to get used up if we use them often, while the other three do not. They also require that the power holder can monitor a subordinate's behavior quickly and accurately, which may not always be possible. For example, if I threaten to fire an employee unless (s)he stops a particularly dangerous work behavior, I need to be able to determine whether or not (s)he has stopped to be able to carry out my threat. In contrast, if the employee shifts to safer working methods because of identification with an admired senior craftsperson, no monitoring from outside is needed. In legitimate, referent, and expert power, the motivation to obey comes from within the person obeying. In reward and coercive power, it comes from outside.

Using power effectively is a delicate matter. Most effective power users seem to mix and match, varying the resources and tactics they use to match particular situations. Kotter (1977) suggests that power is used most effectively by using first the subtlest, least abrasive methods available, and resorting to the harsher methods only as a last resort. Threats of firing, for example, should probably be used only after encouragement, persuasion, and other alternatives have been thoroughly tried.

One reason for this strategy is that harsh methods tend to produce power-limiting responses. If a plant's management is heavily punitive and authoritarian, the employees are more likely to form a union, strike, leave, or use sabotage to get back at the management, thereby reducing management's power. If Strauss's purchasing agents were able to gain complete power over the other departments, it seems likely that the other departments would retaliate in some way, perhaps forming a coalition to persuade higher management to rein in the agents, perhaps setting up purchasing departments of their own. In general, unsubtle or

abusive use of power is likely to provoke one or more power-limiting responses, such as:

1. **Retaliation.** As we saw earlier, even low-ranked members of the organization can hold significant power. If they feel badly used by a power-holder, they are likely to use their own power to hit back. The boss who abuses a secretary is likely to find messages going astray, letters mailed late, and embarrassing (if untraceable) leaks of confidential information.

2. **Regulation.** The robber barons of the later nineteenth century acquired vast fortunes by oppressing their workers, employing children, and allowing horrible working conditions. They also inadvertently brought about the extensive governmental regulation of hours of work, minimum pay rates, and safety of working conditions.

3. **Escape.** If those who hold power use their power excessively, those over whom they wield it may simply move, perhaps to another job, another organization, another area of work, or even to another country.

4. **Opposing coalitions.** A group of people all aggrieved over the same power holder can form a coalition to depose him or her, or to limit the oppressive power. Unions are one example of a formal coalition opposing company management; workers achieve power by pooling their control of the labor supply. A mutiny aboard ship and an informal slow-down on the assembly line are examples of the same kind.

5. **Resource depletion.** The power holder may be forced into using up the resource(s) underlying his or her power. Instead of reacting to threats, the subordinates can force the supervisor to take disciplinary action and then appeal the actions. The supervisor is then forced to justify each and every decision, taking up time and making it more likely that higher management will intervene.

6. **Substitutes.** If the power base centers on control of a particular resource, it may be undermined or eliminated by development of alternative means of acquiring that same resource. The power of the bank to dictate spending decisions is limited by the availability of other sources of money. The power of the internal computer expert is limited by the availability of outside consultants. In each case, the alternative may cost more, but may be worth it, to limit the power of the original person or group.

These and other tactics generally set limits on how far a particular power holder can go in exploiting his or her resources. But perhaps the most familiar limit is that the experienced power holder knows where the limits of power are, and stays within them. If everyone uses every power resource to its fullest extent, the organization is likely to fall

apart, hurting everyone in it. It is common enough that yesterday's subordinate becomes tomorrow's boss, so self-interest dictates that one be prudent about not abusing one's present power. There are good practical reasons why most of us share a "norm of reciprocity" about the use of power. We stick to what is seen as fair, in a sense that is hard to define but that is generally well understood. It is only when someone plays outside these rules of fair play that limiting tactics such as those listed above come to be used.

POWER AS CONTROL OF DECISION PROCESSES

A useful way to think about power is to consider how the power holder shapes the decision making of the person over whom (s)he has power. Even the mugger's power can be seen in this way. The threat, "Give me your wallet or I'll kill you," still leaves me with a decision to obey or not, though I would be very stupid to disobey. More generally, one could consider each of the variables in the expectancy model and think about how each could be operated by a power holder.

For example, some of the structural tactics may allow the power holder to influence who gets to make a particular decision, by influencing appointments to key jobs or membership on key committees. It may also be possible to influence the information available to these decision makers, by changing flows of information or assembling evidence. The power holder may be able to influence which alternative actions are considered, what consequences flow from each, and what values are attached to these consequences. Reward and coercive power both operate directly on the consequences that follow from the person doing one thing rather than another. Referent power might be seen as controlling the value of one particular outcome: being like the person identified with. Expert power turns on the expert being able to provide sound information on the consequences of particular actions.

At the strategic level, control of the decision process is again key. Strategic contingencies theory argues that precisely those who are able to deal with the most pressing and uncertain decisions will gain in power. They acquire control over the key decisions because they are seen as able to make them well. This in turn allows them to influence other aspects of the organization's decision-making process to produce the outcomes they value. They are able to shape ill-defined problems into ones that need their expertise, as in emphasizing the legal aspects rather than the engineering aspects of new-product decisions, in our earlier example. Thus, at both the individual and the organizational level, the acquisition and use of power can be mapped directly into control over one or another aspect of the decision process.

SUMMARY

We defined "power" as the ability of one person to get things done as (s)he wishes, even when others disagree. This ability is a characteristic of the relationship between two or more people, not of any one person. We identified several sources of power: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert. Some combinations of all five can be used effectively, but some interfere with the use of others.

Analysis of who holds which power bases in particular situations helps us to understand how power is acquired. Low-ranking members of the organization can acquire power by various means: expertise, effort, attractiveness, position, forming coalitions, or adroit use of rules. The actual distribution of power in an organization is thus considerably more complex than is implied by one's position in the hierarchy.

The distribution of power in the organization is considered by strategic contingencies theory, which holds that individuals and units acquire power to the extent that they are able to deal successfully with important, high-uncertainty problems facing the organization. In an example, we saw how different departments acquired power and were later able to consolidate and extend this power, by their ability to cope with the key problem facing the organization. Power shifts are an important way in which organizations respond to their changing environments, though probably not in any precise or speedy way.

The use of power needs to be tailored to the person or group—the target—it is aimed at, and to the situation. Various tactics of power use were discussed in an example of how one department head, the purchasing agent, exercised power over others nominally at the same level. These tactics include using and evading rules, personal/political tactics, educational/persuasive approaches, and organizational tactics. The choice of tactic is a delicate matter: power is not a precision instrument; it can affect the user as well as the target. In particular, the target can respond to abuse of power in various ways: by retaliation, by getting the power holder regulated, by escape, by forming opposing coalitions, by forcing the holder to use up his or her power base, or by developing substitutes for the resource controlled by the power holder.

In the final section, we considered power in terms of ability to shape another's decision. At the individual level, we saw that power holders can operate in a variety of ways, such as influencing who gets to make the decision, what alternatives are considered, what information is available, the consequences that flow from each decision, and the value attached to these consequences. At the organizational level, strategic contingencies theory describes exactly this shift of influence over decision making as the basis of power allocation.

CLOSING COMMENT

A final point needs to be reiterated in closing this chapter. We suggested earlier that, particularly for scientists and engineers, the use of power is seen as somehow unsavory, underhand, not fair, or otherwise irrational—as a "bad thing." I hope this bias has now been dispelled. Power is inherently neither good nor bad, and it seems to be essential for organizations to run at all. It is found at every level, from the lowest employee to the highest. Each can use the power (s)he has for good or bad purposes. Used carefully, power provides the engine for effective organizational functioning, for getting something accomplished. To the extent that strategic contingencies theory is true, the shifting of power distributions is an important way of keeping the organization in touch with the reality of its world. Obviously, abuse of power can have serious consequences, although the limitations on abuse may stop it from continuing indefinitely. In any event, power exists, and must be reckoned with. It must be understood, grasped, and used carefully. Merely to deplore it, to complain about self-seekers and office politics, is to ignore an important lever for influencing the organization's activities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: CHAPTER 6

1. Junior employees often complain that they have trouble getting their ideas put into practice—that is, that they have insufficient power. How might a junior employee go about acquiring significant power in the form of:

   a. Reward power

   b. Coercive power

   c. Legitimate power

   d. Referent power

   e. Expert power

   Rate each of these power bases in terms of how easily a junior employee might acquire them.

2. Strategic contingencies theory suggests that departments acquire power in proportion to their ability to deal with the organization's critical problems. Why might the actual distribution of power in an organization differ from this apparently desirable form?

3. Suppose you are a member of a service department such as maintenance or computer programming. How might you use the five tactics described by Strauss (1962) to gain some autonomy and resist the demands placed on you by the departments you serve? Would this be in the organization's interests or not?

4. Because you were highly successful in using the five tactics in Question 3, your service department became very powerful. How might the client departments react to this development?

5. A colleague complains to you that an excellent technical idea of his for how the manufacturing department could increase its output has been rejected because of "office politics"—that is, because the manufacturing department has the power to reject proposals from outsiders. How might you argue that it is a good thing for manufacturing to be in a position to do this, even if it means they reject some good technical ideas?

Chapter 7
Leadership

MAJOR TOPICS

Appointed and Emergent Leaders
Effective and Ineffective Leaders
Models of Effective Leadership
    Fiedler's Contingency Model
    The Vroom-Yetton Model
    Consideration/Structuring Models
    Path-Goal Theory
Other Issues
    What Causes What?
    Leaders or Situations?
    Is Leadership Real?
Summary