Sources of power

GLOBAL INTEGRATION™

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Introduction

This tool helps you to understand the range of sources of power and influence that you have available to you to get things done in a complex environment and the likely consequences of exercising this type of power.

It provides a checklist of sources of power that you can use to think through more creative ways to exercise influence and get things done.

One of the reasons we set up a matrix or virtual way of working is to balance the power of the traditional silos by adding more horizontal reporting lines or activities. Traditional hierarchical control and power may be shared or absent in a matrix or virtual team, so getting things done involves exercising a wider range of sources of power and influence.

Experienced leaders, new to the matrix, often complain about the difficulty of influencing without traditional authority – perhaps this reflects an over-reliance on traditional authority as a way of getting things done.

In reality successful leaders tend to use a wide range of sources of power and influence. Falling back on traditional authority to insist people comply is often counter-productive.

However, every action creates an opposite and equal reaction - this is **Newton's third law of motion.**

When we exercise a particular type of power as a leader, it creates a 'followership response' It is important to understand the likely consequences if you exercise these different forms of power.

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We asked participants in our training whether they preferred working for a solid line (direct reporting) boss or a dotted line boss. Most of them preferred a dotted line boss because they felt that someone without traditional authority had to work a bit harder to engage and influence them.

Here is a brief summary of the eight most common types of power that you may have access to, and some of the consequences of using them.

> **Position** – the power of role. In a matrix, positional power is often shared and therefore may be diluted. Managers need to find ways to align and ally with their colleagues. The use of traditional hierarchical authority as a source of power is likely to be less productive in creating accountability, engagement and responsibility.

> **Normative** – based on values. This is an extremely important source of power in a matrix – it provides guidance on the right way to resolve complex dilemmas and choices across complex reporting lines, geographies and cultures. Matrix organizations require strong shared practices and beliefs to be successful.

> **Reward** – the ability to deliver rewards and punishments. In a matrix this will be shared and may be subject to input from peers and colleagues across the organization rather than entirely within the hands of the line-manager. Financial rewards are rather blunt tools for encouraging cooperation. Recognition and other more immediate forms of reward become more powerful.

> **Coercive** – the use or threat of force has become less effective in organizations. It still exists at some level, such as in the termination of employment of poor performers. However, it tends to create unwilling compliance and the level of resistance it creates means its use is nearly always counter-productive in getting things done.

> **Personal** – respect for your personal characteristics. This remains important in a matrix but it relies on your visibility in the organization. Individuals need great networks and good communication skills to be successful at transmitting their personal power across the organization.

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> **Expert** – from superior knowledge, skills and abilities. One of the objectives of a matrix is to give easier access to expertise. Expertise is extremely powerful in a matrix and we need mechanisms to make it easy to identify and access expertise. Social media profiles will make it easier in the future to identify and contact individual experts without going through the whole organization in between.

> **Relationship** – the power of trust, shared goals and sense of identification. This is extremely important and relationships will increasingly cross the organization rather than being vested in the vertical functions. This form of power tends to create a willing style of followership.

> **Information** – having more and better sources of information. While this can be powerful it should be our objective in a matrix to make information visible and transparent to everyone involved in the process or activity. If individuals are hoarding information in order to create power for themselves then this is counter-productive.

Others might include:

> **Resources** – this may be at an organizational level, or it could be just an individual's ability to decide how they spend their time. One goal of introducing a matrix is to share resources more freely across the organization. Using resources politically to increase your power however can be counter-productive.

> **Alliances** – we can derive power from the people we know and are able to influence and from the other people that we can bring with us once we are persuaded. Alliances are an important source of influence and power in the matrix.

> **Social influence** – who trusts our opinion and listens to what we say? This type of influence is being magnified by social media as individuals develop 'followership' of people who choose to pay attention to them.

> **Reciprocity** –the power of having a favour in the bank. People seek ways to repay those who have helped them in the past. It is always useful to find opportunities to give support in advance, so that support is available in return when you need it.

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Use the table to make notes about your own situation

> When and how can you use this form of power in a matrix?

> What is the impact on your 'followers' of using this type of power?

The Tool

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Working in a matrix changes the type of power you have access to, and how effective they are. We also need to consider what the impact of using this type of power has.

Types of power	How can I use this power in a matrix?	What is the impact of using this type of power?
Position The power of role		
Normative Based on value		
Reward The ability to deliver rewards and punishments		
Coercive Use or threat of force		
Personal Respect for your personal characteristics		
Expert From superior knowledge, skills and abilities		
Relationship Power of trust, shared goals, sense of identification		
Information Having more and better sources		

Conclusion

Traditional 'command and control' forms of power such as position, hierarchy and coercion become less and less effective with well-educated and skilled employees. At best they may create an unwilling style of followership where compliance is more important than genuine commitment. In general, even if you have access to these forms of power, they should be used very sparingly.

Other forms of power such as normative, expertise, relationships and social influence are becoming increasingly important in a matrix. The use of these types of power is likely to create a more positive form of employee engagement.

When trying to exercise power and influence in a complex environment, use this checklist to consider all the sources that you have available and be clear about the consequences of using anything you choose.

Successful leaders tend to use a wide range of sources of power and influence to get things done.