

Power (philosophy)

Power is frequently defined by political scientists as the ability to influence the behavior of others with or without resistance. The term authority is often used for power perceived as legitimate by the social structure. Power can be seen as evil or unjust, but the exercise of power is accepted as endemic to humans as social beings. In the corporate environment, power is often expressed as upward or downward. With downward power, a company's superior influences subordinates. When a company exerts upward power, it is the subordinates who influence the decisions of the leader (Greiner & Schein, 1988). Often, the study of power in a society is referred to as politics.

The use of power need not involve coercion (force or the threat of force). At one extreme, it more closely resembles what everyday English-speakers call "influence", although some authors make a distinction between power and influence – the means by which power is used (Handy, C. 1993 *Understanding Organisations*).

Much of the recent sociological debate on power revolves around the issue of the enabling nature of power. A comprehensive account of power can be found in Steven Lukes *Power: A Radical View* where he discusses the three dimensions of power. Thus, power can be seen as various forms of constraint on human action, but also as that which makes action possible, although in a limited scope. Much of this debate is related to the works of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984), who, following the Italian political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), sees power as "a complex strategic situation in a given society social setting"^[1]. Being deeply structural, his concept involves both constraint and enablement. For a purely enabling (and voluntaristic) concept of power see the works of Anthony Giddens.

Sources of power

Power may be held through

- Delegated authority (for example in the democratic process)
- Social class (material wealth can equal power)
- Resource currency (material items such as money, property, food)
- Personal or group charisma
- Ascribed power (acting on perceived or assumed abilities, whether these bear testing or not)
- Expertise (ability, skills) (the power of medicine to bring about health; another famous example would be "in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king" – Desiderius Erasmus)
- Persuasion (direct, indirect, or subliminal)
- Knowledge (granted or withheld, shared or kept secret)
- Celebrity
- Force (violence, military might, coercion).
- Moral persuasion (including religion)
- Operation of group dynamics (such as public relations)
- Social influence of tradition (compare ascribed power)
- In relationships; domination/submissiveness

JK Galbraith summarises the types of power as being "Condign" (based on force), "Compensatory" (through the use of various resources) or "Conditioned" (the result of persuasion), and their sources as "Personality" (individuals), "Property" (their material resources) and "Organizational" (whoever sits at the top of an organisational power structure). (Galbraith, *An Anatomy of Power*)

Erica Grier, a professor of Psychology at the University of Harvard, categorized power into the following possible sub-headings.

- Aggressive (forceful)
 - Manipulative (persuasion)
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Theories of power

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) defined power as a man's "present means, to obtain some future apparent good" (Leviathan, Ch. 10).

The thought of Friedrich Nietzsche underlies much 20th century analysis of power. Nietzsche disseminated ideas on the "will to power", which he saw as the domination of other humans as much as the exercise of control over one's environment.

Some schools of psychology, notably that associated with Alfred Adler, place power dynamics at the core of their theory (where orthodox Freudians might place sexuality).

Rational choice framework

Game theory, with its foundations in the theory of Rational Choice, is increasingly used in various disciplines to help analyse power relationships. One rational choice definition of power is given by Keith Dowding in his book *Power*.

In rational choice theory, human individuals or groups can be modelled as 'actors' who choose from a 'choice set' of possible actions in order to try to achieve desired outcomes. An actor's 'incentive structure' comprises (its beliefs about) the costs associated with different actions in the choice set, and the likelihoods that different actions will lead to desired outcomes.

In this setting we can differentiate between:

1. **outcome power** – the ability of an actor to bring about or help bring about outcomes;
2. **social power** – the ability of an actor to change the incentive structures of other actors in order to bring about outcomes.

This framework can be used to model a wide range of social interactions where actors have the ability to exert power over others. For example a 'powerful' actor can take options away from another's choice set; can change the relative costs of actions; can change the likelihood that a given action will lead to a given outcome; or might simply change the other's beliefs about its incentive structure.

As with other models of power, this framework is neutral as to the use of 'coercion'. For example: a threat of violence can change the likely costs and benefits of different actions; so can a financial penalty in a 'voluntarily agreed' contract, or indeed a friendly offer.

Marxism

In the Marxist tradition, the Italian writer Antonio Gramsci elaborated the role of cultural hegemony in ideology as a means of bolstering the power of capitalism and of the nation-state. Drawing on Niccolò Machiavelli in *The Prince*, and trying to understand why there had been no Communist revolution in Western Europe, whilst there had been in Russia, Gramsci conceptualised this hegemony as a centaur, consisting of two halves. The back end, the beast, represented the more classic, material image of power, power through coercion, through brute force, be it physical or economic. But the capitalist hegemony, he argued, depended even more strongly on the front end, the human face, which projected power through 'consent'. In Russia, this power was lacking, allowing for a revolution. However, in Western Europe, specifically in Italy, capitalism had succeeded in exercising *consensual* power, convincing the working classes that their interests were the same as those of capitalists. In this way revolution had been avoided.

While Gramsci stresses the significance of ideology in power structures, Marxist-feminist writers such as Michele Barrett stress the role of ideologies in extolling the virtues of family life. The classic argument to illustrate this point of view is the use of women as a 'reserve army of labour'. In wartime it is accepted that women perform masculine tasks, while after the war the roles are easily reversed. Therefore, according to Barrett, the destruction of capitalist economic relations is necessary but not sufficient for the liberation of women.^[2]

Hohfeld

Professor of jurisprudence Wesley Newcomb Hohfeld defined power more narrowly as the ability to unilaterally alter rights.^{[3] [4] [5]} Without requiring all right-holders' consent, such an alteration necessarily entails the use or threat of force, whether legitimate or not. MIT professor of philosophy Judith Jarvis Thomson uses this definition extensively in her book *The Realm of Rights*.^[6]

Tarnow

Tarnow^[7] considers what power hijackers have over air plane passengers and draws similarities with power in the military. He shows that power over an individual can be amplified by the presence of a group. If the group conforms to the leader's commands, the leader's power over an individual is greatly enhanced while if the group does not conform the leader's power over an individual is nil.

Lukes

In *Power: A radical view* (1974) Steven Lukes outlines two dimensions through which power had been theorised in the earlier part of the twentieth century (dimensions 1 and 2 below) which he critiqued as being limited to those forms of power that could be seen. To these he added a third 'critical' dimension which built upon insights from Gramsci and Althusser.

One-dimensional

- Power is decision making
- Exercised in formal institutions
- Measure it by the outcomes of decisions

In his own words, Lukes states that the "one-dimensional, view of power involves a focus on *behaviour* in the making of *decisions* on *issues* over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*, seen as express policy preferences, revealed by political participation."

Two-dimensional: 1D plus:

- Decision making & agenda-setting
- Institutions & informal influences
- Measure extent of informal influence
- Techniques used by two-dimensional power structures:
 - Influence
 - Inducement
 - Persuasion
 - Authority
 - Coercion
 - Direct force

Three-dimensional: Includes aspects of model 1 & 2, plus:

- Shapes preferences via values, norms, ideologies
- All social interaction involves power because ideas operate behind all language and action
- Not obviously measurable: we must infer its existence (focus on language)
- Ideas or values that ground all social and political activity
 - E.g. religious ideals (Christianity, secularism)
 - Self-interest for economic gain
- These become routine – we don't consciously 'think' of them.
- Political ideologies inform policy making without being explicit, e.g. neoconservatism.

Clegg

Stewart Clegg proposes another three dimensional model with his "circuits of power"^[8] theory. This model likens the production and organizing of power to an electric circuit board consisting of three distinct interacting circuits: episodic, dispositional, and facilitative. These circuits operate at three levels, two are macro and one is micro. The *episodic circuit* is the micro level and is constituted of irregular exercise of power as agents address feelings, communication, conflict, and resistance in day-to-day interrelations. The outcomes of the episodic circuit are both positive and negative. The *dispositional circuit* is constituted of macro level rules of practice and socially constructed meanings that inform member relations and legitimate authority. The *facilitative circuit* is constituted of macro level technology, environmental contingencies, job design, and networks, which empower or disempower and thus punish or reward, agency in the episodic circuit. All three independent circuits interact at "obligatory passage points" which are channels for empowerment or disempowerment.

Toffler

Alvin Toffler's *Powershift* argues that the three main kinds of power are violence, wealth, and knowledge with other kinds of power being variations of these three (typically knowledge). Each successive kind of power represents a more flexible kind of power. Violence can only be used negatively, to punish. Wealth can be used both negatively (by withholding money) and positively (by advancing/spending money). Knowledge can be used in these ways but, additionally, can be used in a transformative way. Such examples are, sharing knowledge on agriculture to ensure that everyone is capable of supplying himself and his family of food; Allied nations with a shared identity forming with the spread of religious or political philosophies, or one can use knowledge as a tactical/strategic superiority in Intelligence (information gathering).

Toffler argues that the very nature of power is currently shifting. Throughout history, power has often shifted from one group to another; however, at this time, the dominant form of power is changing. During the Industrial Revolution, power shifted from a nobility acting primarily through violence to industrialists and financiers acting through wealth. Of course, the nobility used wealth just as the industrial elite used violence, but the *dominant* form of power shifted from violence to wealth. Today, a *The Third Wave* (Toffler) of shifting power is taking place with wealth being overtaken by knowledge.

Gene Sharp

Gene Sharp, an American professor of political science, believes that power depends ultimately on its bases. Thus a political regime maintains power because people accept and obey its dictates, laws and policies. Sharp cites the insight of Étienne de La Boétie.

Sharp's key theme is that power is not monolithic; that is, it does not derive from some intrinsic quality of those who are in power. For Sharp, political power, the power of any state - regardless of its particular structural organization - ultimately derives from the subjects of the state. His fundamental belief is that any power structure relies upon the subjects' obedience to the orders of the ruler(s). If subjects do not obey, leaders have no power.^[9]

His work is thought ^[10] to have been influential in the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic, in the 2011 Arab Spring, and other passive revolutions.

Unmarked categories

The idea of *unmarked categories* originated in feminism. The theory analyzes the culture of the powerful. The powerful comprise those people in society with easy access to resources, those who can exercise power without considering their actions. For the powerful, their culture seems obvious; for the powerless, on the other hand, it remains out of reach, élite and expensive.

The *unmarked category* can form the identifying mark of the powerful. The unmarked category becomes the standard against which to measure everything else. For most Western readers, it is posited that if a protagonist's race is not indicated, it will be assumed by the reader that the protagonist is Caucasian; if a sexual identity is not indicated, it will be assumed by the reader that the protagonist is heterosexual; if the gender of a body is not indicated, will be assumed by the reader that it is male; if a disability is not indicated, it will be assumed by the reader that the protagonist is able bodied, just as a set of examples.

One can often overlook unmarked categories. Whiteness forms an unmarked category not commonly visible to the powerful, as they often fall within this category. The unmarked category becomes the norm, with the other categories relegated to deviant status. Social groups can apply this view of power to race, gender, and disability without modification: the able body is the neutral body.

Counterpower

The term 'counter-power' (sometimes written 'Counterpower') is used in a range of situations to describe the countervailing force that can be utilised by the oppressed to counterbalance or erode the power of elites.^[11]

In the book *Counterpower: Making Change Happen*, a definition rooted in the political science literature is offered, stating 'if power is the ability of 'A' to make 'B' do something 'B' would not otherwise have done, Counterpower is the ability of 'B' to resist the power of 'A'.^[12]

A related definition has been provided by the anthropologist David Graeber as 'a collection of social institutions set in opposition to the state and capital: from self-governing communities to radical labor unions to popular militias'.^[13] Graeber also notes that counter-power can also be referred to as 'anti-power' and 'when institutions [of counter-power] maintain themselves in the face of the state, this is usually referred to as a 'dual power' situation'.^[13]

Although the term has come to prominence through its use by participants in the the global justice/anti-globalization movement of the 1990s onwards,^[14] the word has been used for at least 60 years; for instance Martin Buber's 1949 book 'Paths in Utopia' includes the line 'Power abdicates only under counter-power'.^[15]

Problems with representation

Gilles Deleuze, the twentieth century French philosopher, compared voting for political representation with being taken hostage. A representational government assumes that people can be divided into categories with distinct shared interests. The representative is regarded as embodying the interests of the group. Many social movements have been successful in gaining access to governments: the working class, women, young people and ethnic minorities are part of the government in many nation-states. However, there is no government where the government represents the population along the characteristics of the categories. The problem of finding suitable representatives relates to an individual's membership of different categories at the same time. The only truly representative government for a population is the population itself.

Six bases of power

Social psychologists John R. P. French and Bertram Raven, in a now-classic study (1959),^[16] developed a schema of sources of power by which to analyse how power plays work (or fail to work) in a specific relationship.

According to French and Raven, power must be distinguished from influence in the following way: power is that state of affairs which holds in a given relationship, A-B, such that a given influence attempt by A over B makes A's desired change in B more likely. Conceived this way, power is fundamentally *relative* – it depends on the specific understandings A and B each apply to their relationship, and, interestingly, requires B's recognition of a quality in A which would motivate B to change in the way A intends. A must draw on the 'base' or combination of bases of power appropriate to the relationship, to effect the desired outcome. Drawing on the wrong power base can have unintended effects, including a reduction in A's own power.

French and Raven argue that there are five significant categories of such qualities, while not excluding other minor categories. Further bases have since been adduced – in particular by Morgan (1986: ch.6),^[17] who identifies 14, while others have suggested a simpler model for practical purposes – for example, Handy (1976),^[18] who recommends three.

Positional power

Also called "legitimate power", it is the power of an individual because of the relative position and duties of the holder of the position within an organization. Legitimate power is formal authority delegated to the holder of the position. It is usually accompanied by various attributes of power such as uniforms, offices etc. This is the most obvious and also the most important kind of power.

Referent power

Referent power is the power or ability of individuals to attract others and build loyalty. It's based on the charisma and interpersonal skills of the power holder. A person may be admired because of specific personal trait, and this admiration creates the opportunity for interpersonal influence. Here the person under power desires to identify with these personal qualities, and gains satisfaction from being an accepted follower. Nationalism and patriotism count towards an intangible sort of referent power. For example, soldiers fight in wars to defend the honor of the country. This is the second least obvious power, but the most effective. Advertisers have long used the referent power of sports figures for products endorsements, for example. The charismatic appeal of the sports star supposedly leads to an acceptance of the endorsement, although the individual may have little real credibility outside the sports arena.^[19] Referent power can be a big responsibility, because you don't necessarily have to do anything to earn it. Therefore, it can be abused quite easily. Someone who is likable, but lacks integrity and honesty, may rise to power – and use that power to hurt and alienate people as well as gain personal advantage. Relying on referent power alone is not a good strategy for a leader who wants longevity and respect. When combined with other sources of power, however, it can help you achieve great success.^[20]

Expert power

Expert power is an individual's power deriving from the skills or expertise of the person and the organization's needs for those skills and expertise. Unlike the others, this type of power is usually highly specific and limited to the particular area in which the expert is trained and qualified. When you have knowledge and skills that enable you to understand a situation, suggest solutions, use solid judgment, and generally outperform others, people will have reason to listen to you. When you demonstrate expertise, people tend to trust you and respect what you say. As a subject matter expert, your ideas will have more value, and others will look to you for leadership in that area.^[21]

Reward power

Reward power depends on the ability of the power wielder to confer valued material rewards, it refers to the degree to which the individual can give others a reward of some kind such as benefits, time off, desired gifts,

promotions or increases in pay or responsibility. This power is obvious but also ineffective if abused. People who abuse reward power can become pushy or become reprimanded for being too forthcoming or 'moving things too quickly'. If others expect that you'll reward them for doing what you want, there's a high probability that they'll do it. The problem with this basis of power is that you may not have as much control over rewards as you need. Supervisors probably don't have complete control over salary increases, and managers often can't control promotions all by themselves. And even a CEO needs permission from the board of directors for some actions. So when you use up available rewards, or the rewards don't have enough perceived value to others, your power weakens. (One of the frustrations of using rewards is that they often need to be bigger each time if they're to have the same motivational impact. Even then, if rewards are given frequently, people can become satiated by the reward, such that it loses its effectiveness.)^[22]

Coercive power

Coercive power is the application of negative influences. It includes the ability to demote or to withhold other rewards. The desire for valued rewards or the fear of having them withheld that ensures the obedience of those under power. Coercive power tends to be the most obvious but least effective form of power as it builds resentment and resistance from the people who experience it. Threats and punishment are common tools of coercion. Implying or threatening that someone will be fired, demoted, denied privileges, or given undesirable assignments – these are examples of using coercive power. Extensive use of coercive power is rarely appropriate in an organizational setting, and relying on these forms of power alone will result in a very cold, technocratic, impoverished style of leadership.^[23]

Informational power

Informational power is based on the potential use of informational resources. This influence can occur through such means as rational argument, persuasion, or factual data. Members of a group can make information into power by giving it to others who need it, by keeping it to themselves, by organizing it in some way, by increasing it, or even by falsifying it.

Power tactics

People use more than rewards, threats, and information to influence others. In everyday situations people use a variety of power tactics to push or prompt others into particular action. There are plenty of examples of power tactics that are quite common and employed every day. Some of these tactics include bullying, collaboration, complaining, criticizing, demanding, disengaging, evading, humor, inspiring, manipulating, negotiating, socializing, and supplicating. These power tactics can be classified along three different dimensions: softness, rationality, and laterality (Falbo & Pepalu, 1980; Raven et al., 1998).

Soft and hard

Soft tactics take advantage of the relationship between person and the target. It is more indirect and interpersonal (e.g. collaboration, socializing). Conversely, hard tactics are harsh, forceful, direct, and rely on concrete outcomes. However, they are not more powerful than soft tactics. In many circumstances, fear of social exclusion can be a much stronger motivator than some kind of physical punishment.

Rational and nonrational

Rational tactics of influence make use of reasoning, logic, and sound judgment, whereas nonrational tactics rely on emotionality and misinformation. Examples of each include bargaining and persuasion, and evasion and put downs, respectively.

Unilateral and bilateral

Bilateral tactics, such as collaboration and negotiation, involve reciprocity on the part of both the person influencing and their target. Unilateral tactics, on the other hand, are enacted without any participation on the part of the target. These tactics include disengagement and fait accompli.

People tend to vary in their use of power tactics, with different types of people opting for different tactics. For instance, interpersonally oriented people tend to use soft and rational tactics (Falbo, 1997). Machiavellians, however, tend to use nonrational tactics. Moreover, extraverts use a greater variety of power tactics than do introverts (Butkovic & Bratko, 2007). Further, men tend to use bilateral and direct tactics, whereas women tend to use unilateral and indirect tactics (Falbo & Peplau, 1980). People will also choose different tactics based on the group situation, and based on who they are trying to influence. It is interesting to note that people also tend to shift from soft to hard tactics when they face resistance (Carson, Carson, & Roe, 1993; Teppner, 2006)

Balance of power

Because power operates both relationally and reciprocally, sociologists speak of the balance of power between parties to a relationship: all parties to all relationships have *some* power: the sociological examination of power concerns itself with discovering and describing the relative strengths: equal or unequal, stable or subject to periodic change. Sociologists usually analyse relationships in which the parties have relatively equal or nearly equal power in terms of *constraint* rather than of power. Thus 'power' has a connotation of unilateralism. If this were not so, then all relationships could be described in terms of 'power', and its meaning would be lost. Given that power is not innate and can be granted to others, to acquire power you must possess or control a form of power currency.^[24]

Psychological research

Recent experimental psychology suggests that the more power one has, the less one takes on the perspective of others, implying that the powerful have less empathy. Adam Galinsky, along with several coauthors, found that when those who are reminded of their powerlessness are instructed to draw Es on their forehead, they are 3 times more likely to draw them such that they are legible to others than those who are reminded of their power.^{[25][26]} Powerful people are also more likely to take action. In one example, powerful people turned off an irritatingly close fan twice as much as less powerful people. Researchers have documented the "bystander effect": they found that powerful people are three times as likely to first offer help to a "stranger in distress".^[27]

A study involving over 50 college students suggested that those primed to feel powerful through stating 'power words' were less susceptible to external pressure, more willing to give honest feedback, and more creative.^[28]

Empathy Gap and Power

"Power is defined as a possibility to influence others"^[29]

The use of power has evolved from centuries. Gaining prestige, honor and reputation is one of the central motives of gaining power in human nature. Power also relates with empathy gap because it limits the interpersonal relationship and compares the power differences. Having power and not having power can affect number of psychological consequences. It leads to strategic versus social responsibilities. Research experiments were done in past, as early as 1968, to explore power conflict.^[30]

Past research

Earlier, research proposed that increased power is related to increased rewards and leads one to approach things more frequently. In contrast, decreased power is related more constraint, threat and punishment which leads one to inhibitions. It was concluded that being powerful leads one to successful outcome, develop negotiation strategies and make more self serving offers. Later, research proposed that differences in power lead to strategic considerations. Being strategic can also mean to defend when one is opposed or to hurt the decision maker. It was concluded that facing one with more power leads to strategic consideration whereas facing one with less power leads to a social responsibility.^[31]

Bargaining Games

Bargaining games were explored in year 2003 and year 2004. These studies compared behavior done in different power given situation.^[32]

Ultimatum Game

In an ultimatum game, the person in given power offers an ultimatum and the recipient would have to accept that offer or else both the proposer and the recipient will receive no reward.^[33]

Dictator Game

In a dictator game, the person in given power offers a proposal and the recipient would have to accept that offer. The recipient has no choice of rejecting the offer.^[34]

Bargaining Games, Conclusion

The dictator game gives no power to the recipient whereas the ultimatum game gives some power to the recipient. The behavior observed was that the person offering the proposal would act less strategically than would the one offering in the ultimatum game. Self serving also occurred and a lot of pro-social behavior was observed.^[35]

When the counterpart recipient is completely powerless, lack of strategy, social responsibility and moral consideration is often observed from the behavior of the proposal given (the one with the power).^[36]

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