



LEADERHIP & POWER

How much and what kinds of power does a leader need to be effective? How do leaders gain or lose power?

Considering that power involves the capacity of one party -the agent- to influence another party -the target- (Yukl, 2010), we can say that power becomes one of the 'measurements' of how much 'influence' the leader can exercise.

In order to be effective, a leader needs to know what are the sources of his/her power. Based the power taxonomy referenced by Yukl's (2010), there are seven sources of power: is it because the position? (Legitimate Power); is the leader in possession of resources and rewards? (Reward Power); has the leader the authority over punishment? (Coercive Power); does he/she have a good reputation? (Referent Power); does he/she have skills or knowledge? (Expert Power); does he/she have control over information? (Information Power); is there control over physical environment/technology? (Ecological power).

Since power is not a static and changes over time and based on diverse, then the leader needs awareness about the different scenarios where the usage of power is needed to enforce a decision, influence an agenda, motivate a team or accelerate performance.

There are circumstances when the same individual or group may require some tangible rewards or punishment and the leader will need to use his/her legitimate power or his/her reward power.

Knowing his/her sources of power and understanding the context, will help the leader to define how much and what kinds of power needs to exercise be effective.

In terms of how do leaders gain or lose power, this is directly related with the sources: most sources of power (with the exception of 'referent' and 'expert' power) are based on the position the leader has. If the position changes, is highly provable that the source of power may be affected. However, wise leaders know how to increase the level of power by refining its sources, cultivating their networks and relationships, and exercising power in different circumstances so the rest of the group know he/she has the ability and wiliness to use it when is needed.

One last important aspect to point out is that in current business environments leaders can no longer only rely on 'role power' and 'command and control' authority (Yukl, 2010). Modern organizations have many circumstances in which you have the need to influence without having the authority. Here is where 'referent' and 'expert' types of power can be exercised and these are types of power that –in general- any leader can cultivate.

Sources:

- 1- Bacon, T. (2011) The Elements of Power: Lessons on Leadership and Influence. USA: AMACOM.
- 2- Yukl, G. (2010). Leadership In Organizations. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc.