David A. Buchanan and Richard J. Badham

Power, Politics, and Organizational Change

3rd edition

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PRAISE FOR *POWER, POLITICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE*

‘It is foolish to ignore or marginalise the role of power and politics in organisational change, yet many practitioners and academics do just that. Fortunately, this must-read book addresses these issues in a clear, concise and practical manner. The first two editions of this book were excellent and very welcome. This edition provides a timely update, building on the quality of the previous editions, especially in terms of its reinterpretation of Machiavelli’s work. I would strongly recommend it to anyone involved in change, whether student, academic or practitioner.’

Professor Bernard Burnes, Stirling Management School, University of Stirling, UK

‘It is an original, well written, frank and insightful book that combines academic knowledge with a good and valuable sense of the realities of organisational life and change projects.’

Professor Mats Alvesson, Lund University, Sweden

‘Long regarded as a realist’s guide to management (as opposed to much of the management literature that often appears to have a reality deficit in its recipes for success), *Power, Politics and Organizational Change* is now in its third edition. It really is a new improved version and bang up to date. A new generation of students, introduced to the necessity of political skills, entrepreneurship and power steering, will be better able to navigate the potholes and pratfalls of the corporate landscape and its rhetoric as a result of reading this book and thus be better agents of change or resistance to its more outlandish claims.’

Professor Stewart Clegg, University of Technology Sydney, Australia

BRIEF CONTENTS

DETAILED CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

Tables

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

David A. Buchanan BA PhD FRSA FCIPD FBAM FAcSS is Emeritus Professor of Organizational Behaviour at Cranfield University School of Management, and Visiting Professor at Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University. He works as a freelance speaker and author, specializing in change leadership and organization politics. He is author/co-author of over two dozen books, including *Organizational Behaviour* (with Andrzej Huczynski; tenth edition, Pearson, 2019), is co-editor of *Unconventional Methodology in Organization and Management Research* (with Alan Bryman, Sage, 2018), and *Managing Organizational Change: A Multiple Perspectives Approach* (with Ian Palmer and Richard Dunford, third edition, McGraw-Hill, 2016). He has also written numerous book chapters and articles on aspects of organizational behaviour, change, politics, and research methods.

David.Buchanan@Cranfield.ac.uk

Dr Richard J. Badham BA Dip. Soc. PhD (Warwick) is Professor of Management in the Macquarie Graduate School of Management, Macquarie Business School. He writes, consults, and teaches on leadership, development, and change. He is the author of the forthcoming book *Ironies of Organizational Change* (Edward Elgar, 2020), and *Theories of Industrial Society* (Routledge, [1986] 2015). He specializes in the use of storytelling, drama, and arts-based interventions. He has been a Visiting Professor at the Yale Centre for Cultural Sociology, a Von Humboldt Senior Fellow at the Technical University and Fraunhofer IPK, Berlin, and consultant to numerous companies including BHP, Ford, and Chris O'Brien Lifehouse, and the governments of West German, Australian, Brunei, and the European Commission.

richard.badham@mq.edu.au

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The flaws and errors in this book, however, remain the responsibility of the authors.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

TAKE A MOMENT AND THINK ABOUT A LEADER

Take a moment and think about a leader in your organization whom you would consider to be political. How would you describe that leader? Some common descriptions that may immediately come to mind are self-serving, manipulative, phony, or untrustworthy. You may conjure up images of secret pacts made behind closed doors or on the golf course. Or, perhaps, you came up with descriptions such as influential, well-connected, trustworthy, or concerned for others. Often, the idea of a leader being political is associated with negative perceptions and behaviors. In reality, though, political skill is a necessity and can be a positive skill for leaders to possess when used appropriately. Indeed, when we view political skill through this lens, it is difficult to envision any leader being effective without it. (Phillip Braddy and Michael Campbell, 2014, p. 1)

Do you want to change and improve the organization in which you work? Do you want to stop others from implementing changes that you think are damaging? If your answer to one or both of these questions is 'yes', then we hope that you will find this book interesting and helpful. However, if you don't want to change anything in your organization, and you don't care what changes others plan to implement, you can put this book down now; it will be of little use to you.

Organizations are political systems, and change is almost always a politicized process. Why? Individuals, groups, and divisions compete with each other for resources (people, money, space, influence), and political tactics are tools that can be used in that competition. Change often upsets the established allocation of resources among stakeholders, intensifying the competition. The change leader, change manager, or change agent must be aware of the organization politics, but must also be prepared to engage with the politics – to 'play the game'.

TAKE ANOTHER MOMENT TO AGREE TERMS

Those who drive change in an organization can have many titles. They are often called change leaders, change managers, or project managers. Other terms in use are: catalysts, change champions, change implementers, positive deviants, shapers, souls-of-fire (Ian Palmer et al., 2016, p. 387). For the sake of simplicity and consistency, we will use the term change agent throughout this book.

The argument of this edition is the same as in our previous editions: the change agent who is not politically skilled will fail, sooner or later, and probably sooner. It is rarely possible for change agents – or for managers in general – to escape this dimension of their role. Wishing the politics away will not make that happen. We have to deal with the world as it is, and not as we would like it to be. But the politics does not have to be negative and destructive, anti-social, back-stabbing and dirty tricks. We will emphasize the constructive, principled, pro-social uses of political behaviour.

Our purpose is to offer a guide to the politics of organizational change and innovation. The exercise of organization politics can be seen as a game in which players compete for different kinds of territory or ‘turf’ (an American term) and in particular for status, power, and influence. What kind of game is this? What, if any, are the rules? How is it played? What ethical issues arise? Should one play this game to win, and if so, how?

Welcome

So, welcome to the third edition of this text. Since the first two editions, further evidence and commentary have been published, and traditional views of organization politics have been revised. The wider social, cultural, and political landscape has also changed in ways that can influence the conduct of organization politics.

Our key selling point thus lies with a conceptual, theoretical, and empirical overview of the field, focusing on how political behaviour influences organizational change, and advocating a creative, reflective, and self-critical approach to the constructive use of political strategies and tactics. This viewpoint contradicts a lot of commentary on organizational change, which either ignores the role of politics, or advises change agents to avoid political games – to be ‘squeaky clean’.

The topic is now covered on many Masters degrees and executive development courses, and we have developed this edition to be used as a core text for specialist courses on organization politics, and as support reading for courses in organizational behaviour, change management, and leadership. Our target readers are managers on post-experience Masters degree programmes in those areas; in our experience, the nature and tactics of organization politics are familiar to this audience. The text is constructed in an engaging writing style, which assumes a readership with practical organizational and managerial experience. Our aim is to make the text entertaining as well as instructive, and also to reflect the non-linear, untidy character of change, and the sometimes devious nature of much of the subject matter. We also hope that this text will encourage instructors to offer courses in organization politics, rather than confine the topic to a session or two in their organizational behaviour courses.

Why political skill?

Most managers see organization politics as a routine part of their experience. Research also shows that political skill is linked to management career success (John Beeson, 2009; Annette Sergeant, 2009; Marla Watkins and Alexis Smith, 2011; Dan Ciampa, 2016). However, organization politics is a controversial subject. Advising managers on how to be more politically adept may not be widely regarded as a legitimate activity. We adopt a different stance, arguing that political behaviour is inevitable and desirable, as political exchanges generate the dynamic and drive the debate behind organization development (OD) and change.

Most managers are likely to find the implementation of innovation and change challenging unless they possess political skill. But formal training, education, and development in the nature and use of political skill are rare. To address this gap, this text provides concepts, ideas, evidence, arguments, case materials, diagnostics, frameworks, assessments, role models, vicarious experience, practical advice, and other material. Of course, one cannot learn how to play organization politics from a textbook. That skill can only be developed with personal experience, and by learning from mistakes.

Current trends highlight the importance of political skill. The stable, ordered, bounded, predictable, rule-based hierarchical organization today seems to be an anachronism. Most organizations are characterized by fluidity, uncertainty, ambiguity, and discontinuity. This is sometimes captured in the awkward acronym VUCA, which characterizes the business environment as Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. The enduring effects of the global financial crisis of 2008, combined with current geopolitical uncertainties, trade disputes, and other conflicts, suggest that VUCA will be with us for some time. In addition, organization boundaries are blurred by the development of partnerships and joint ventures, sub-contracting and outsourcing, peripheral workforces and virtual teams, gig economy working, and social and technology-based collaborative networks.

How are these trends related to political skill? Hierarchy is being replaced by reliance on expert power; those who understand the issues take the decisions regardless of seniority or job title. This fluid context means increasing reliance on personal and interpersonal resources, and thus on political skills, to advance personal and corporate agendas. Many managers, and especially those with roles that include responsibility for change, have no direct line authority over those on whose cooperation they must rely, and have to use methods other than traditional command and control. There is greater scope for political manoeuvring in a less well-ordered and less disciplined organizational world, hence the need for a critical understanding of the nature, shaping role, and consequences of political behaviour. Those with the best-developed political skills thus attract more resources and support.

Is this a view in which all change agents are politicians, and politics is all about self-interest and manipulation? No. Organizations have social, technical, economic, and cultural aspects as well as a political dimension. In a text like this, political behaviour is taken aside for a focused examination because the topic is omitted or misrepresented elsewhere. The conventional toolkits of change, in project management, in socio-technical system analysis and design, in organization development, and in planned change methods, remain valuable, but these are adequately dealt with elsewhere. Political behaviour – the games and the tactics – must be seen in this wider context.

The political entrepreneur

What is our ‘ideal’ portrait of the politically skilled change agent? As discussed later in the book, this incorporates competencies, a behaviour repertoire, and also the creative, self-critical, diagnostic, and judgemental perspective captured by the term *expertise*. Deciding how to act in a given situation is a question of informed improvisation; this does not involve simply reading tactics off a checklist. Knowledge of the context and other players must inform a creative choice of strategy and tactics. We think, therefore, that it is helpful to move the terminology away from organization politicians, political will, political astuteness, and political skill. To this end, we have borrowed the term *political entrepreneur* from Michael Laver (1997).

The term political entrepreneur captures more effectively the political expertise that is required in a change agency role. The term ‘political activist’ suggests a role that is national, visible, and ruthless, while 'political operator' implies Machiavellian self-serving deviousness. But the term political entrepreneur highlights the risk-taking and creative dimensions of the role of the change agent, and also captures the personal commitment to, even passion for, change. The term political entrepreneur suggests more than a behaviour repertoire, referring also to a perspective that integrates political strategies and tactics with an innovative, reflective, self-monitoring approach to how those behaviours should be deployed. We explore the profile of the political entrepreneur in Chapter 9 (see Table 9.8).

Politics in a post-truth world

Since the second edition of this book, we have seen major developments in national political rhetoric. These concern the use of 'fake news' and 'alternative facts' to promote or to discredit individuals, groups, and others' political agendas. We seem to be living in a post-truth world, particularly with regard to the practice of national politics and international relations. This is a world in which:

- appeals to what people believe are more powerful than appeals to evidence and reason
- emotions are also more important than evidence in influence attempts
- 'facts', 'evidence', and 'expert advice' are dismissed as inaccurate, biased, or as a hoax
- views spread rapidly through social media without checks on their origins or accuracy
- arguments are met with insults rather than with evidence, reason, and counter-arguments
- some people simply refuse to listen to evidence that they don't like
- mainstream media and journalists are not trusted to report truthfully.

These phenomena are not new, but the behaviours and tactics are now more widely used, by public figures, routinely in public settings, attracting media attention and comment (most, but not all, critical). The terms 'fake news' and 'alternative facts' have become part of everyday language. These are default tactics for some prominent politicians. There is, therefore, wider appreciation of the nature and impact of these behaviours. Many of us are aware of these attempts to influence our thinking, potentially making us more cynical and resistant to such obvious manipulation. Used carelessly in an organizational context, these behaviours may attract similar dismissive responses.

LEADERSHIP BULLSHIT (BS)

Should change agents be 'squeaky clean' and avoid playing politics? Jeffrey Pfeffer (2016) notes that many famous leaders – including Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, and John F. Kennedy – were pragmatists who were willing to use their power and political tactics to achieve what they believed were important objectives. This contradicts current leadership advice, which emphasizes authenticity, telling the truth, and building trust (see our discussion in Chapter 4). Pfeffer claims that we often confuse what we believe ought to be true with what actually is. Citing a biography of the famous American President Abraham Lincoln, Pfeffer (2016, p. 94) notes that:

> Sometimes, this approach to leadership required Lincoln to make deals he was initially uncomfortable with to gain the support of legislators, notably to win passage of the constitutional amendment that outlawed slavery. Sometimes, it required Lincoln to depart from the truth – for example, about precisely where a Southern peace delegation was as it approached Washington and when it might arrive, to give him an opportunity to negotiate privately with its members. Sometimes, it required him to display energy and confidence that he might not really have felt. The ability to do what is required in and by a situation, to behave in usefully inauthentic ways, characterized not only Lincoln but also, I would argue, many other great leaders.

However, information games and impression management tactics are key components of the organization politics toolkit. In order to drive change agendas in the face of potential competition and resistance, change agents must actively manage the impression that others have of them; we will discuss this later in terms of reputation management. Change agents must also consider carefully the content and timing of the information that they reveal, and also the information that they withhold. These are just some of the political tactics that change agents can use, and which could be described as attempts to exert influence through misleading information – or fake news.

If we are critical of the post-truth world of populist politicians, how can we justify the use of these behaviours by organizational change agents? Making this justification even more problematic is the current trend for authentic, ethical, transparent leadership. Surely we should take the opposing view, that change agents must act with integrity and openness and avoid political games?

Our justification has four components. First, political behaviour is often justified by the context, which includes the actions of others. We do not argue that change agents should use these tactics in all situations. Second, political behaviour may be triggered by the desire to implement organizationally beneficial initiatives, and not by the desire for personal gain (but if the changes are successful, the reputation of the change agent will be enhanced). Third, it is a common misperception that political tactics are necessarily unethical. In his discussion of political savvy, Joel DeLuca (1999) uses the term ‘ethical influence’. For example, we can be ‘economical with the truth’ (in other words, we lie) when we want to protect someone else’s feelings or self-esteem, or to avoid damaging a relationship. Fourth, those who are concerned with their authentic personal style may be interested in Herminia Ibarra’s (2015b) argument; she distinguishes three styles. *Chameleons* ‘try on’ different styles, and can be seen as insincere. *True-to-selfers* say what they really think and feel, regardless of the circumstances, and do not adapt to new demands. Those who are *adaptively authentic* experiment with new approaches in order to identify what is appropriate to the task and challenges they face.

In other words, our change agent is distinguished from the populist politician by matters of context, intention, situational ethics, and deliberate choice of style.

What's new in this edition

- The concept of *new power*, which is fluid and participative, is driven by social media, and is challenging our traditional understanding of power.
- Recognition of *the positive role of organization politics* as potentially pro-social and constructive, delivering corporate as well as individual benefits, balancing the conventional, negative view of politics as 'dirty tricks' and an 'evil necessity'.
- A *reinterpretation of Machiavelli's thinking*, which sees him as a realist and a pragmatist. His advice to the prince is based on the bad behaviour of others, and not as many commentators have argued on the essential nature of princes. Machiavelli, in other words, was not himself Machiavellian in the sense which that term – now an insult – has come to imply.
- New *research evidence* concerning the management experience and perceptions of organization politics, including studies concerning the nature and development of political skill, political astuteness, and political will.
- Recent work on *the glass ceiling and glass cliff*, which affect the careers of women seeking senior leadership positions. This discussion includes research examining the role of the media in perpetuating negative cultural stereotypes in their portrayal of professional women.
- A pragmatic Machiavellian approach to bullshit rhetoric and bullshit jobs. In contrast to the over-simplified outrage of *BS busters*, we adopt a more nuanced and down-to-earth view of how and why BS is so common, and what to do about it. In contrast to currently fashionable 'evidence-based management' critiques, we argue for a pragmatic *Theory M* approach.
- Exploration of the challenge of effectively '*telling tales*' that are credible and convincing in an era in which post-truth rhetoric is common. As a counter to stereotyped 'bright-side' positive storytelling and 'dark-side' condemnation of post-truth villainy, we provide a *sailing guide* to help political entrepreneurs to help and motivate themselves and others to navigate this complex terrain.
- The politics of *speaking up* and *speaking truth to power*. Silencing, denial, and defensiveness are rampant in organizations. A routine part of organizational life is experience with 'elephants in the room', 'skeletons in the closet', and issues 'swept under the carpet'. How to deal with the risks involved in 'calling the game' is a major test of political will and skill. We explore the tactics and strategies that the political entrepreneur might deploy in facing up to this challenge.
- Exploration of political skill, or *political expertise*. What is political skill? What does it mean to be an expert politician? How is political expertise developed? Can this be taught?
- Discussion of the implications of recent research into the concept of *political will*. What is political will? How is it shaped and developed? To what extent is political will undermined by the stigma attached to organization politics? What are the implications for leadership and management behaviour?
- *Issue-selling tactics* and the role of politically skilled middle managers in shaping and implementing strategic change initiatives.

- Fresh *teaching materials*, which can be adapted for personal and instructional use, including incident reports, self-assessments, organization diagnostics, and analytical frameworks. This new edition also cites well-known television series that illustrate politics in action, such as *Bad Banks* (Germany), *Utopia* (Australia), *Borgen* (Denmark), *Spin* (France), and *Vice* (US). Dramatized fictional accounts offer valuable insights into the nature, practice, and implications of organization politics, for both skilled and unskilled players – issues that are difficult to demonstrate with conventional teaching methods and media.

Structure of the book

Chapter 1, **Power: what is it, and how do I get more?** explores contrasting perspectives on the concept of power, including 'new power'. We consider why power is central to the role of the change agent, and consider the power bases that are key to this role. Different sections of an organization often have different levels of power. We explore why this is the case, and how technology developments are shifting this power balance. We then consider the exercise of power through the use of influence tactics, and describe how you can further enhance your personal power through the use of power tells, powertalking, and power priming. This chapter concludes by introducing a further power base that is often overlooked: your reputation.

Chapter 2, **Political behaviour: power in action**, first challenges the negative stereotype of organization politics, demonstrating the range of organizational and individual benefits that can be achieved through the skilful and constructive use of political behaviour. There is also a clear link between political skill and career success. We also explore definitions of key terms including politics, political skill, political will, and political astuteness. The definition of politics is controversial, and we explore why. We also present the findings of research into the management experience of politics, identifying popular and rare tactics, and linking the antecedents of political behaviour to a range of individual and organizational consequences through a varied behaviour repertoire of political tactics.

Chapter 3, **But is it ethical?**, presents a series of incident reports from managers describing examples of political behaviour in their own experience. How should someone faced with political tactics respond? One answer to this question relies on an 'ethics test'. However, the problems of determining whether or not political behaviours are ethical are discussed, and an alternative, more practical approach is presented. This chapter introduces three central concepts concerning *warrant* for political actions, *accounting* for those actions, and *reputation*, concerning how a change agent is perceived by other members of the organization. Case material at the end of the chapter illustrates this argument in practice, using actual examples of political behaviour.

Chapter 4, **Cutting the bullshit**, highlights the nature of 'bullshit' in general, and current controversies around 'business bullshit' in particular. These themes, we argue, are not addressed effectively in mainstream organization and management studies. How should we address this increasingly widespread phenomenon? In contrast to the 'evidence-based management' of high-minded bullshit busters, we make the case for flexible Machiavellian pragmatism, and a strategy of creative realism is proposed for cutting the bullshit.

Chapter 5, **It is different for women**, considers evidence regarding gender differences concerning organization power, politics, and influence. We know that women are under-represented in positions of power, and we explore why this is the case. But do women approach organization politics differently from men? Do women and men play the same game? Is political skill equally central to the careers and reputations of male and female managers? We strongly suggest that the research evidence which supports the traditional stereotypes of 'tough males' and 'tender females' may now be dated. Other evidence and experience argue that women in management and change agency roles recognize the need for a broad repertoire of political skills, and behave accordingly.

Chapter 6, **Telling tales**, emphasizes the importance of good storytelling as a leadership capability, and as a key factor in political mobilization. This chapter highlights the challenges of this enterprise in what many perceive to be a post-truth era. In this context, we argue that good storytelling has to go beyond narratives of positive politics and 'bright-side' rhetoric and tactics of the positive psychology and positive politics movement. It also means avoiding a relapse into the authoritative pronouncements and high-minded moralism of many critics of the 'dark side' of contemporary leadership and organizations. In contrast to uncritical celebration or condemnation of post-truth heroes and villains, we make the case for a creative and reflective post-truth entrepreneur.

Chapter 7, **Speaking up**, highlights the significance and risks of speaking truth to power, and explores the political astuteness required to carry this off effectively. Speaking truth to power has been an appeal and catch-cry of both managerial and radical critics. Yet the challenges and dangers of 'calling the game' are considerable, and its practice complex. This chapter takes a critical look at narrow approaches to psychological safety and naïve assumptions of common interests underlying many recommendations for speaking up. We make the case for going beyond naïve enthusiasm and principled opposition in proactively grappling with silencing and defensiveness in organizational life.

Chapter 8, **Power assisted steering**, offers practical advice to change agents in the use of political strategies and tactics. Much of that advice is couched in 'simple recipe' terms, offering checklists in the style of 'do this', and 'don't do that'. Missing from this advice is any notion of the frame of reference, or perspective, required to translate such guidance into appropriate and effective action. Practice in this domain cannot follow a recipe, but is creative, judgement-based, and improvisatory. The change agent typically deploys 'complicating strategies', which are multi-dimensional, multi-faceted, complex, and evolving through time, based on the opportunities and resources available in a given context. This improvisational approach, based on 'intuitive artistry' involves *bricolage*; as discussed in Chapter 7, the change agent is a *bricoleur*.

Chapter 9, **Political expertise: why you need it, and how to develop it**, explores how organizational trends have heightened the significance of political skill, and identifies the triggers and intensifiers of politics, concluding that political behaviour is a naturally occurring phenomenon. An overview of Michel Foucault's perspective on power is provided, emphasizing the pervasive and productive aspects of power. The concepts of political will and political skill are explored. Skill and competence are narrow and fragmented concepts, we propose the alternative concept of *political expertise*, which also involves informed judgement, creative improvisation, and critical self-monitoring. We draw a portrait of the political entrepreneur, which is not a personality type but a perspective, a way of approaching, a lens through which organizational issues and their political dimensions can be analysed to inform effective and sustainable action.

1

POWER

WHAT IS IT, AND HOW DO I GET MORE?

Chapter objectives

Why power?

Perspectives on power – new and traditional

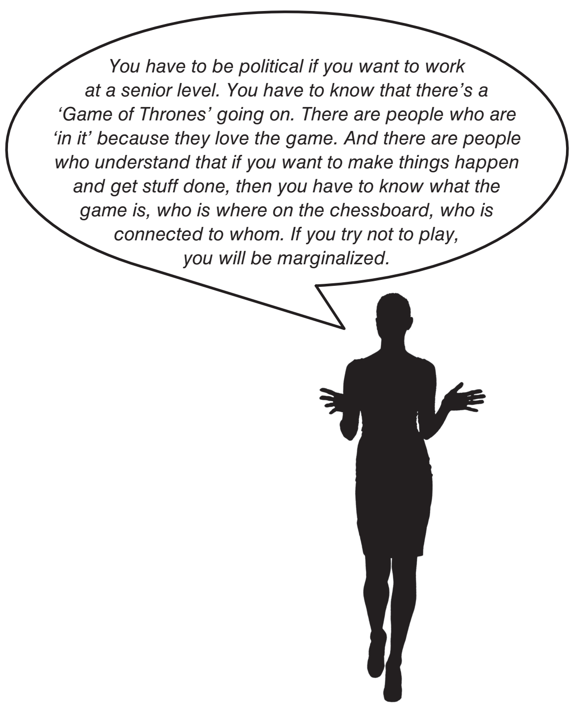
Power across the organization

Power and influence: change agent as compliance professional

Power tells, powertalking, and power priming

Reputation as power base

Follow through



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Chapter objectives

1 To understand the nature, role, and importance of power in organizations.
2 To compare novel and conventional perspectives on power.
3 To identify bases of power, and practical steps for strengthening these.
4 To explore why some sections of an organization are more powerful than others, and how this power balance is changing.
5 To consider the influence tactics that can be used to win support for change projects.
6 To explore practical use of power tells, powertalking, and power priming.
7 To examine the argument that your reputation is also an important power base.

Why power?

- **power**: the ability to overcome resistance on the part of others, to exert your will, and to get results that are consistent with your own interests and objectives

What is power, and why do you need it? Bertrand Russell (1938, p. 12) once observed that, 'the fundamental concept in social science is power, in the same sense in which energy is the fundamental concept in physics'. Power seems to be a straightforward concept. We know what it is when we see it, and it is not difficult to distinguish between those who have it, and those who do not. Power is commonly seen as a property of individuals – a commodity or a currency – owned and exercised through social and interpersonal skills. As we will see, however, this view is over-simplified.

Power is a 'contested concept'; there is little or no consensus around its nature and implications, or how it should be defined. In this chapter, we will explore these contrasting perspectives, and suggest that a diversity of views is more valuable than attempting to legislate on one correct approach. We will consider why power is central to the role of the change agent, and explore ways to strengthen the change agent's power bases. The sections or departments of most organizations are not all equally powerful; we explore why this is the case, and indicate how this power balance is shifting. We will then consider the exercise of power through influencing tactics, and how you can enhance your personal power through the use of power tells, powertalking, and power priming. Finally, we will introduce a power base that is critical for the change agent, but is often overlooked – your reputation.

Another common view is that power corrupts. Some evidence seems to support this view. However, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, an American academic and management consultant, argues that *powerlessness* corrupts. Why? When leaders lack power, they have to become shouty and aggressive in order get others to do what they want them to do. The American gangster Al Capone once famously said, 'You can go a long way with a smile. You can go a lot farther with a smile and a gun.' A leader who has power can get things done more quickly and easily than one who does not. Leaders who do not have power, and who are either unwilling or unable to 'play the politics', often struggle to achieve their objectives.

An inescapable feature of organizational life, the exercise of power can be damaging, but as we shall demonstrate, power and politics can also be used in constructive ways, to solve problems, generate consensus, resolve conflict – and above all to drive change. Change in an organization can intensify the power plays and political behaviour, because change creates winners and losers – or individuals and groups who believe that their positions will either be strengthened or weakened. Power is often a motive for change, reinforcing someone's power base, and limiting others' (Roy Suddaby and William Foster, 2017).

We think of organizations as rational and orderly, with decisions based on evidence and reason, focusing on efficiency and effectiveness. But organizations are also political systems, and decisions are shaped by influence tactics that are designed to promote the interests of individuals or groups. As organizations become less hierarchical, and come to rely more on networks and teams, the use of power and influence becomes more important than formal authority. Power and politics are linked. Power can be seen as the ability to get other people to do what you want them to do, and it is often necessary to use political tactics to achieve those ends. Political behaviour can thus be seen as 'power in action'.

An organization's members do not always share the same values and goals. Disagreements over the definitions of problems, and how best to solve them, are normal. These disputes are often healthy, by exposing different perspectives and issues, and by reducing support for lousy ideas. What happens, however, when the sharing of views fails to produce consensus? Sometimes, those with the best ideas win. Often, the winners are those who are more powerful, and who are able to exercise influence 'behind the scenes', by 'playing politics'. Good ideas do not always sell themselves, and rational arguments may not be effective on their own. As the American diplomat Henry Kissinger once said:

> Before I served as a consultant to [President John F.] Kennedy, I had believed, like most academics, that the process of decision-making was largely intellectual and all one had to do was to walk into the President's office and convince him of the correctness of one's view. This perspective, I soon realized is as dangerously immature as it is widely held. (Pfeffer, 1992, p. 31)

POWER CORRUPTS – BUT POWERLESSNESS IS A BIGGER THREAT

Dacher Keltner (2017) argues that power is part of every relationship, and every social interaction that we have. Power is not just something that applies to leaders and senior managers. He observes that we gain power by showing empathy, openness, fairness, and by collaborating with others. However, the behaviour of those who have achieved power often changes, and they become rude, selfish, and unethical. This is what Keltner calls 'the power paradox'; our good qualities give us the power, which then allows our bad qualities to surface. Keltner describes a laboratory experiment in which one member of a group of three was given the leadership role, and they were all then given a writing task. While they were writing, Keltner brought them a plate with four cookies. In every case, each team member took a cookie and, being polite, left the extra one. Would anyone eventually take the extra cookie? In almost every case, those who had been named as leaders took the extra cookie, and were more likely to eat it with their mouths open, lips smacking, spraying crumbs on their clothes. Another study found that drivers of inexpensive cars always gave way to pedestrians at crossings, but drivers in BMWs and

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Mercedes gave way to pedestrians only half the time. The more expensive the vehicle, the more entitled its owner felt to break the law or to behave in an aggressive, arrogant way.

This evidence suggests that power does corrupt. Is power corrupting you? Keltner (2016, p. 114) offers the following test questions:

> Are you interrupting people? Do you check your phone when others are talking? Have you told a joke or story that embarrassed or humiliated someone else? Do you swear at the office? Have you ever taken sole credit for a group effort? Do you forget colleagues' names? Are you spending a lot more money than in the past or taking unusual physical risks? If you answered yes to at least a few of these questions, take it as an early warning sign that you're being tempted into problematic, arrogant displays of power.

Keltner argues that we can beat the power paradox by being more self-aware, and by showing more empathy, gratitude, and generosity towards others. However, Keltner (2017, p. 10) introduces another paradox, arguing that powerlessness is a bigger problem. Powerless means having little control over one's life, which is caused by poverty, inequality, racism, and gender bias. Why is this a problem?

> The costs of powerlessness, which are so often the result of others succumbing to the power paradox, are profound. Powerlessness amplifies the individual's sensitivity to threat; it hyperactivates the stress response and the hormone cortisol; and it damages the brain. These effects compromise our ability to reason, to reflect, to engage in the world, and to feel good and hopeful about the future. Powerlessness, I believe, is the greatest threat outside of climate change facing our society today.

Decisions, therefore, are often the result of power plays, bargaining, negotiation, jockeying for position. Leaders who lack power, and who are not politically skilled, can find it difficult to make things happen and get things done. And these capabilities make you more employable. After the job interviews, someone on the panel might say, 'professionally, this candidate is very well qualified . . . but'. Here, they are referring to your lack of power and political skill: do not get caught by 'the but problem'.

As a result of the negative stereotype, however, many managers have a problem with power. Jeffrey Pfeffer (2010) identifies three barriers that prevent managers from using power constructively. The first is a belief in a 'just world' in which, if you do a good job, rewards will automatically follow; self-promotion is not necessary. But if you believe that, Pfeffer argues, you will not build a power base, and your progress will be slow. Second, if you read the stories of successful leaders, you won't find them describing the power plays that got them the top jobs. Leadership, according to the textbooks, should be about authenticity, honesty, humility. But Pfeffer argues that this is a wish list which does not reflect the realities of leadership. The third barrier concerns our self-esteem and integrity, which encourage us to maintain a positive self-image, not tarnished by something as ugly as power. The change agent has to overcome these barriers. Major changes are often controversial, with others trying to undermine them; the change agent needs power. We follow up Pfeffer's argument about the role of power and political behaviour in implementing change in Chapter 8.

How will you as a change agent use power in your role? The exercise of power does not have to be nasty and destructive (but see the ‘Game of Thrones’ example below). As with any tool, the outcomes depend on why and how you use it. With my hammer, I can fix your furniture, or shatter your skull. David McClelland (1970; 1975) argues that, with achievement and affiliation, the **need for power** (*n*Pow) is culturally acquired, or learned. Some of us develop a need to lead and influence others, and are more likely to use power and political behaviour. Since a desire to control others and events, and to have an impact on what is going on, is associated with effective management, it is not surprising that this trait is sought after in candidates for managerial jobs – an issue that we will discuss in the next chapter.

- **need for power** (*n*Pow): the desire to make an impact on others, change people or events, and make a difference in life

David McClelland and David Burnham (1995, pp. 129–130) distinguish between ‘institutional managers’ and ‘personal power managers’. The latter seek personal gain at the expense of others and ‘are not disciplined enough to be good institution builders’:

> [They] exercise their power impulsively. They are more often rude to other people, they drink too much, they try to exploit others sexually, and they collect symbols of personal prestige such as fancy cars or big offices.

Institutional managers combine power motivation with self-control, and are ‘the socialized face of power’:

> [T]he good manager’s power motivation is not oriented toward personal aggrandizement but toward the institution that he or she serves. [They] are more institution minded; they tend to get elected to more offices, to control their drinking, and have a desire to serve others.

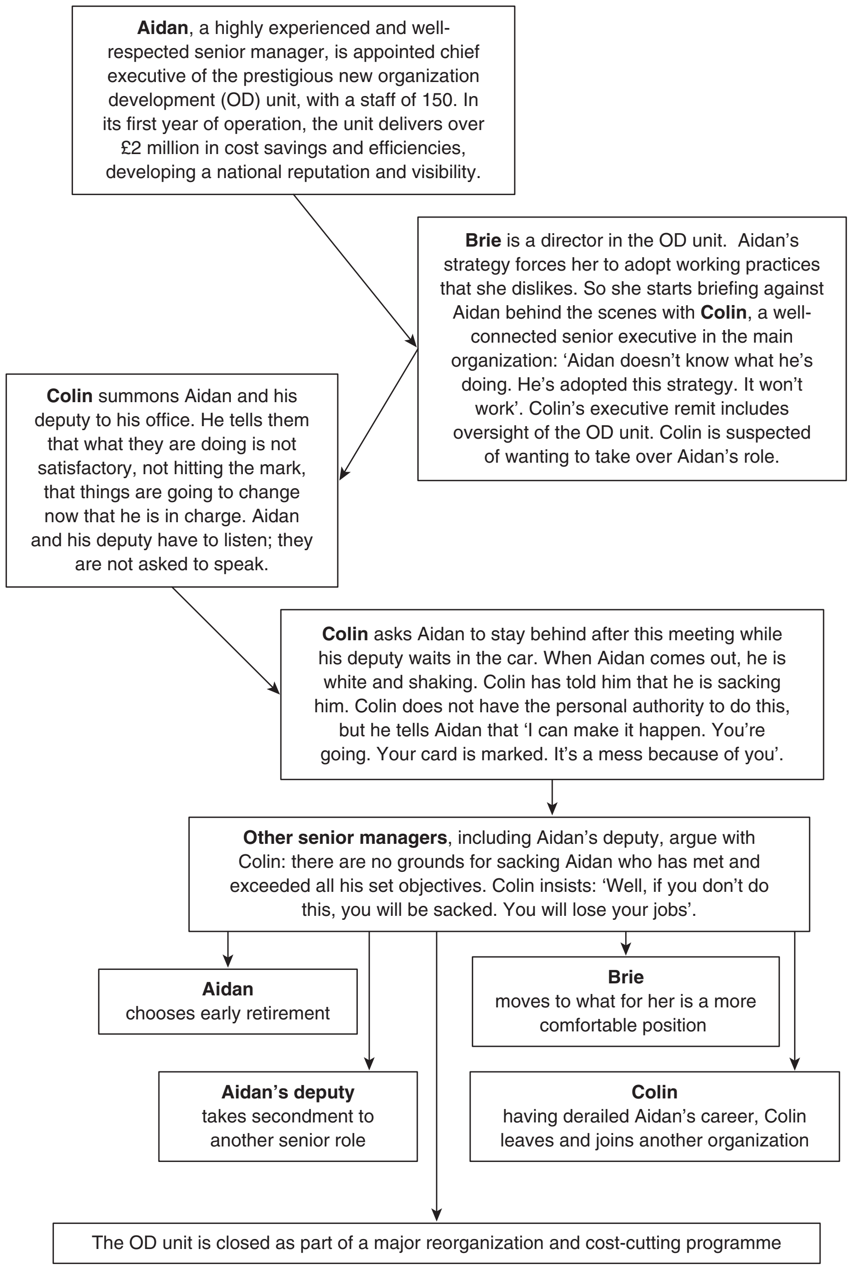
Good ‘institutional’ managers have the following profile:

- they feel responsible for developing the organizations to which they belong
- they believe in the importance of centralized authority
- they enjoy the discipline of work, and getting things done in an orderly way
- they are willing to sacrifice self-interest for organizational welfare
- they have a keen sense of justice, concerning reward for hard effort.

Which of these profiles fits more closely with your view of your own motivation, your understanding of power, and your role as a change agent? Are you the good, institutional manager who uses power in the interests of the organization, rather than in pursuit of your own self-interest?

Research by John Maslyn et al. (2017) found that political behaviour is not always viewed unfavourably, but can be seen as positive when it benefits the organization and its members. Rather than try to eliminate politics, as that would be futile, they suggest that managers should exercise their power and use political behaviour to achieve goals that are beneficial for the organization as well as individuals. The distinction between institutional and personal power managers is too ‘textbook tidy’; institution building and personal career enhancement can be pursued at the same time.

Game of Thrones



Source: Ex-chief executive of another closely related organization

Perspectives on power – new and traditional

Interviewer: How do you mean – the soft side? Politics is usually covert, symbolic, rather than formal visible displays?

Change agent: I guess what I'm saying is, if you're asking people to . . . what's power, OK? Power is control. If you're talking about fundamental changes which bring about fundamental power shifts, what you're asking people to do is to either give up their control or change the nature of their control. I think that there's aggressive ways of doing that, but there's also ways of doing that which are 'nicer'. Methods of going about things that, because you're creating a context for people and because they have got a bigger picture and understand where they fit in and are part of the process of change, often people are willing to forego some of that control because of what they get back in exchange. And I've seen that happen a lot with doctors. When you go to doctors and say, we want to change your role and we're going to take all your nurses out of your outpatient clinics and swap them for unqualified workers 'cos you don't need a nurse – they go mad. But if you say, 'we've got a situation here, what do you think the key issues are, how do you think we should go about creating solutions?' Approached in that way, people will change fundamentally, because they've bought into the problem, and also bought into the solution. And they will forego control.

As we suggested earlier, several competing perspectives on power have been developed. This can seem to be confusing, but it is useful to view the concept from a number of different angles, and to be aware of their respective strengths and limitations. We will explore four perspectives. Breaking with convention, we will explore the most recent of these first, involving the concept of 'new power' and the role of social media. We will then explore three traditional perspectives. One views power as something you own or possess, a property of the individual. A second sees power as a property of the relationship between one individual (or group) and another. A third sees power embedded in social and organization structures.

New power and social media

Technology, the internet, and social media are bringing major changes to the nature of work, and power in organizations is not exempt from these influences. Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms (2014; Timms and Heimans, 2018) argue that traditional concepts of power (which we will explore shortly) are being challenged by a new set of values and behaviours based on our growing desire for more participation, collaboration, and co-production. 'Old power', they argue, is like a *currency*, to be owned: it is difficult to accumulate, few have large quantities, and they guard it jealously. 'New power', on the other hand, is like a *current*, which is generated by many, through group participation, and is open, participative, and peer-driven. New power is more dispersed, and is also based on our technological ability to participate, through social media in particular. Heimans and Timms identify five ways in which participation is widening:

sharing: passing what one person has said or created on to others (e.g. Facebook)

shaping: adapting content or ideas to create a new message (e.g. Facebook)

funding: providing financial support for ideas (e.g. crowdfunding, peer-to-peer lending)

producing: creating content for a community of peers (e.g. YouTube, TaskRabbit)

co-owning: sharing ownership of something (e.g. Wikipedia, Linux).

You are not just a passive user of YouTube; you can create your own content and share it with others. This ‘peer-based collective action’ means that collaboration is becoming the norm. Participation is regarded as a right, to shape and create aspects of our lives. New power encourages ‘DIO’ or ‘do it ourselves’, solving social problems, for example, without the need for conventional bureaucracies. Traditional privacy is being replaced by permanent transparency as more people live on social media.

Heimans and Timms identify four types of organizations depending on their business models and their values. *Castles* are companies that have old power business models and old power values, such as Apple and the American National Security Agency. *Cheerleaders* combine old power models with new power values, such as the clothing companies Patagonia and Zappos. *Connectors* have new power models, but still work with old power values, such as Facebook and Uber. *Crowds* are peer-driven organizations that combine new power models and values, such as Wikipedia, Kickstarter, and HuffPost. New power, however, is not necessarily benign. Timms and Heimans (2018, p. 53) argue:

> The future will be won by those who can spread their ideas better, faster, and more durably. In a world of fake news, climate change deniers, Holocaust deniers, anti-vaxers, and all manner of extremists, the stakes are high. Those on the side of the angels, who want to spread compassion, promote pluralism, or defend science, must first grapple with a painful reality: that new power can supercharge hate and misinformation. In fact, those darker forces often start at an advantage because their provocations compel our attention and our clicks. It isn’t enough to simply have the facts on your side.

You may have seen new power at work in your own organization, and you may participate in new power movements yourself. If so, you will have seen how new power easily and quickly bypasses traditional authority structures and communication channels. But Timms and Heimans also draw attention to ‘the dark side’ of new power. This tool can be used for positive or destructive purposes.

NEW POWER IN ACTION: THE *GILETS JAUNES*

French law requires all motorists to have yellow high-visibility jackets – *gilets jaunes* – in their vehicles for use in emergencies. In November 2018, these jackets were chosen as a symbol by protesters angry about rising fuel prices, the high cost of living, and the burden of taxation on the working and middle classes – while taxes on the affluent urban elite had been cut. The protestors demanded lower fuel taxes, reintroduction of the wealth tax, and an increase in the minimum wage. The focus of their anger was Emanuel Macron, President of France.

Demonstrations involving over 300,000 people across France, included civil disobedience, barricading roads and fuel depots, and disabling traffic cameras. Some protests became violent, with vandalism, arson, and looting. Fires were lit in the streets, signs were torn down, and cobblestones were torn up. Television news showed crowds in the Champs-Élysée in Paris, vandalizing shops and the Arc de Triomphe, and police using tear gas and water cannon to disperse the crowds. Thousands of people were injured (including police officers), many were arrested, and there were 10 fatalities.

An example of new power in action, this grassroots, populist protest movement was leaderless, and spread through social media. Informal leaders did emerge, but they were rejected and sometimes threatened, because they were seen as 'would-be politicians'. As a consequence, the government could not identify anyone to negotiate with. The *gilets jaunes* movement began with two online petitions, one of whose organizers circulated a video through Facebook suggesting the symbolic use of the *gilet jaune*. What did this new power movement achieve? In December 2018, President Macron cancelled the planned rise in fuel tax, announced an increase in the minimum wage and a delay in electricity price rises, and removed taxes on overtime and bonuses.

Based on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow_vests_movement (accessed 11 November 2019)

Power as personal property

Turning to the traditional perspectives on power, one of the most influential sees power as something that you possess, resources that you can accumulate. In this view, you collect and grow power from the position that you as a manager hold in the organization (structural sources), and from individual attributes (personal sources). The main structural sources of power include:

- your formal position and authority
- your physical and social position in the organization's communication network
- the centrality of your unit or section to the business
- your role in resolving business-critical problems and reducing uncertainty
- your ability to cultivate allies and supporters
- the degree of unity and lack of internal dissent in your section
- access to and control over information and other resources
- the pervasiveness of your activities in the organization, and being irreplaceable.

These structural sources of power depend on local circumstances and do not apply to everyone. But these sources explain why, traditionally, organizational accountants tend to have more power than human resource managers – an issue that we will examine in more detail shortly.

Personal sources of power include:

- energy, endurance, stamina, resilience
- ability to focus energy and avoid wasteful effort
- ability to read and understand others
- selecting flexible means to achieve goals
- personal toughness – willingness to engage in confrontation and conflict
- ability to 'play the subordinate' or 'play the team member' to get the support of others.

In this perspective, as power is something you can accumulate, you can take steps to strengthen both your structural and individual sources of power. Look for jobs in key departments, make friends with power brokers, join important networks and projects, develop your interpersonal and impression management skills, and emotional intelligence. Be aware, however, that others in your organization are also trying to accumulate power at the same time.

TOUGH AT THE TOP

Don't expect senior leaders to work well with other senior leaders. High power individuals, it turns out, do not collaborate as well with each other as groups whose members have lower power. In a series of studies, John Hildreth and Cameron Anderson (2016) found that groups of otherwise capable leaders performed badly and were less creative when working together. They were accustomed to exercising power over those around them, and found it difficult to work with and to reach agreement with others who were equally powerful. They were more concerned to preserve their status, less concerned with the task in hand, and less willing to share information.

Power as a relational property

Power is typically seen from the viewpoint of the person exercising it. However, Michel Crozier (1973, pp. 7–8) argues that it is necessary to look beyond this individual standpoint and to see power, 'as a relationship between individuals or groups, as a process developing over time'. Crozier (1973, p. 9) also points out that power relations are often reciprocal: 'if A can make B do something he would not have done otherwise, it is quite likely that B, for his part, is capable of making A do something he would not have done without B's intervention'. As Andrew Pettigrew and Terry McNulty (1995, p. 851) argue, 'Power is not an attribute possessed by someone in isolation. It is a relational phenomenon. Power is generated, maintained and lost in the context of relationships with others'.

This relational perspective derives from the work of John French and Bertram Raven (1958) who identified five power bases: reward, coercive, referent, legitimate, and expert

(Table 1.1). If someone promises you promotion or money to do as they ask, then they are using reward power. If they threaten you with demotion or redundancy, they are using coercive power. When they rely on their warm and charming personality, they are using referent power. If they rely on their formal organizational position to get you to comply, they are using legitimate power. When they can claim superior knowledge and understanding of the situation or problem, they are using expert power. Referent power is also known as charisma (German, *Ausstrahlung*, force of personality). Legitimate power is also known as position power, because it relies on formal organizational role and title.

Table 1.1 Five power bases

reward power	is based on the belief of followers that the change agent has access to valued rewards which will be dispensed in return for compliance
coercive power	is based on the belief of followers that the change agent can administer penalties or sanctions which are unwelcome
referent power	is based on the belief of followers that the change agent has desirable abilities and personality traits which can and should be copied
legitimate power	is based on the belief of followers that the change agent has authority to give directions, within the boundaries of their position or rank
expert power	is based on the belief of followers that the change agent has superior knowledge relevant to the situation and the task in hand

The power bases identified by French and Raven have interesting features. First, these power bases depend on the perceptions of others. Perceptions shape our behaviour as much as whatever constitutes reality. A change agent may be able to control rewards and penalties, and have superior knowledge, but if others do not believe that the change agent possesses these attributes, then they may be unwilling to comply with requests. Similarly, change agents may be able to persuade others that they do possess power which they do not have, and compliance may be forthcoming even though the change agent does not have access to, say, rewards, sanctions, expertise, or friends in high places.

Second, these five power bases are interrelated. The exercise of one can affect your ability to use another. The change agent who uses coercive power, for example, may lose referent power, but one can deploy legitimate power to enhance both referent and expert power. Third, the change agent can use more than one power base at a time, using different power bases, in different combinations, in different contexts, and at different times, with different people.

This framework was developed further by Robert Benfari et al. (1986), who identify eight power bases, adding information, affiliation, and group power (Table 1.2). They note that the exercise of power can be seen by recipients as either positive (P+) or negative (P–), depending on the circumstances. Reward power and referent power are usually welcome, while coercive and information power are usually seen in negative terms. But perceptions of the other power bases depend on how they are exercised. The abuse of authority to bully others is scorned; the exercise of strong leadership in a crisis is praised. Allowing others access to the thinking of senior figures through affiliation power may be regarded favourably, while inflexible appeal to 'what senior management wants' may not.

Table 1.2 Eight power bases, not all negative

Power base	Explanation	Seen as
reward	positive strokes, remuneration, awards, compliments, symbolic gestures of praise	P+
coercion	physical or psychological injury, verbal and non-verbal put-downs, slights, symbolic gestures of disdain, physical attack, demotion, unwanted transfer, withholding of needed resources	P–
authority	management right to control, obligation of others to obey, playing 'the boss' and abusing authority	P–
	exercise of formal leadership in a crisis	P+
referent	identification based on personal characteristics, sometimes on perception of charisma; or reciprocal identification based on friendship, association, sharing personal information, providing something of value to the other, and on common interests, values, viewpoints and preferences; creation of reciprocal 'IOUs'	P+
expert	possession of specialized knowledge valued by others, used to help others, given freely when solicited	P+
	unsolicited expertise, seen as an unwarranted intrusion; expertise offered in a condescending manner can be seen as coercive; withholding expertise in times of need is seen as negative	P–
information	access to information that is not public knowledge, because of position or connections; can exist at all levels in the organization, those at the top may know less about what is going on; secretaries and personal assistants to senior executives often have information power, and can control information flows to and from superiors	P–
affiliation	'borrowed' from an authority source with whom one is associated – executive secretaries and staff assistants act as surrogates for their superiors; acting on the wishes of the superior	P+
	acting on their own self-interest; using negative affiliation power by applying accounting and personnel policies rigidly	P–
group	collective problem solving, conflict resolution, creative brainstorming; group resolution better than individual contributions	P+
	a few individuals dominating the proceedings, 'groupthink'	P–

Benfari and colleagues (1986, p. 16) also claim that referent power is under-utilized – an argument that seems as important, if not more so, in the twenty-first century than when it was first expressed:

> Because of multiple programs and limited resources, conflict is an everyday occurrence. The key to conflict resolution is the ability to negotiate workable psychological contracts with colleagues who have no formal reporting obligations. The use of threats (coercive power) or appeals to upper authority can lead to long-term conflict. The party under siege can, at some time in the future, make use of affiliation power to retaliate. Acquiring and using referent power effectively is important not only to managers in matrix organizations but to all managers at any level in any organization.

They offer suggestions for building referent power, as a ‘cheap and easy way to build a relationship’, noting that this should be neither time-consuming nor costly:

- get to know the motives, preferences, values, and interests of your colleagues
- build relationships using shared motives, goals, and interests
- respect differences in interests and don’t attack another person’s style
- give ‘positive strokes’, use reward power, confirm others’ competence
- invite reciprocal influence, show that you respect the opinions of others
- share information, give your expertise, particularly where you stand to benefit
- minimize concerns with status, put signs of office aside, people relate to equals
- develop communication skills, people value clear and consistent messages
- get to know how people react to stress and crisis
- get to know the informal political structure of your organization.

A key point here is that your power bases are not given and static. You can lose power, and you can also take steps to strengthen those power bases. One of the ‘follow-through’ exercises at the end of this chapter invites you to identify power bases which for you are weak, and to decide what you could do in order to strengthen that power base.

The main problem with the ‘property’ and ‘relational’ perspectives is that they offer a surface view of power, as something that can be neatly categorized, and confined to interpersonal relationships. These perspectives overlook the less visible, structural, or ‘embedded’ nature of power – a fourth perspective, which we will examine next.

Power as an embedded property

This perspective explores how power controls our behaviour through less obvious and less visible means. Power is woven into the fabric of our society and our organizations. We take many things for granted, such as social and organization structures, the system of rules that we routinely follow, the day-to-day ‘natural order’. These are the unwritten rules concerning ‘the way things are done around here’. These routine features of our surroundings influence our behaviour in subtle ways, and we rarely challenge them, because they are ‘normal’. It can be difficult to challenge ‘the way things are’ without appearing to be odd or extreme. But many aspects of ‘the way things are’ reflect an established pattern of power relations, and not some immutable aspect of social life. However, it is in the interests of those who can manipulate and control these taken-for-granted norms that the unequal distribution of power is accepted, and is not subjected to challenge.

Here we enter the cloudy domain of organization culture, concerning values, standards, modes of behaviour, expectations, rituals, procedures, and goals. These all combine to create a fabric of norms and expectations that shape attitudes and behaviour, and influence the distribution of power across the organization’s membership. This fabric, this power distribution, is fluid and not static, shifting with circumstances and rarely stable. However, those unwritten cultural norms and expectations can be exploited in exactly the same way as written, formal procedures, to support an argument or a position, to advance a perspective, or to challenge or block an initiative being driven by someone else.

One interesting aspect of this face of power is *non-decision-making* (Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, 1962). This refers to the ways in which key figures work behind the scenes to ensure that processes, situations, and rules are constructed to prevent those with complaints or demands from expressing their views openly, and thus avoiding conflict. Agendas are restricted to ‘safe’ issues; controversial issues are excluded from informal conversations and formal decision-making forums; procedures are invoked to exclude those in subordinate roles from debates. Power brokers decide outcomes backstage, in the corridor, before meetings.

Another mechanism, which Bachrach and Baratz call the *mobilization of bias*, can favour some individuals, groups, interests, and topics, over others. The norms and procedures of an organization, ‘the rules of the game’, can be designed to function systematically to the benefit of some, and the disadvantage of others. This can lead to a situation in which concerns are not raised because some problems are not recognized as such. Individuals and groups may thus be rendered politically passive because they accept the ‘existing order’, or because they lack the understanding or imagination to conceive of a different order, or because they anticipate that resistance will be ineffective. Non-decision-making and the mobilization of bias can take three forms (Stewart Clegg, 1989, p. 77):

1. the more powerful deal with the grievances of the less powerful by ignoring them, by dismissing them as minor, unsubstantiated, or irrelevant, or by subjecting them to endless and inconclusive consideration by committees and enquiries
2. anticipating the consequences, the less powerful may see that their grievances and demands will be ignored or dismissed, and do not raise them in the first place
3. the more powerful define which matters are legitimate and discussible, and the forums and procedures through which such issues are raised, thus stifling the articulation of some issues and demands, while encouraging ‘acceptable’ or ‘safe’ topics and themes.

These quite different forms of power relationships can be deeply embedded in organization structures and procedures, such that they come to be accepted as normal and are not questioned. Steven Lukes (2006) calls this the ‘third dimension’ of power, where the potential demands of subordinate groups are not raised, not because channels are unavailable, but because they have been socialized into not seeing these as problems. Embedded power relations work by influencing our basic understanding, perceptions, and cognitions. Change agents need to understand how these issues are intertwined, their own scope for manoeuvre, and the modes of influence that are available to them – and open to others.

Valuing diversity

We have described four concepts of power:

1. power as *a fluid current*, generated by group participation, dispersed, open, leaderless, peer-driven, and facilitated by social media
2. power as *a property of individuals*, expressed in terms of power sources and bases, structural and individual
3. power as *a property of interpersonal relationships* between organization members, expressed in the perception that some individuals possess or lack particular power bases
4. power as *an embedded property* of the structures, procedures, and norms of society and the organization, perpetuating existing routines and power inequalities.

The notion of power as an embedded and pervasive construct, lacking a clear and distinctive definition, has three major consequences. First, this alerts us to the less tangible dimensions of power, found in the taken-for-granted procedures and practices of the organization, and of society as a whole. This is important because intangibility is not the same as insignificance. On the contrary, these dimensions of power can be extremely potent in skilful hands. In addition, that which cannot be readily seen, described, or defined can be extremely difficult to challenge and resist. Embedded power cannot be linked easily with the actions of any one particular individual, or even with the 'behind the scenes' manoeuvres of those who want to prevent the open discussion of controversial issues. But if you can control indirectly the actions of others by getting them to accept particular norms and assumptions, in other words to 'internalize' those values and beliefs, not only is challenge stifled, but it is difficult to find someone to blame for doing the stifling. Embedded power sustains the dominance of the powerful by reducing the ability of the powerless to complain. This is simple to achieve: 'I'm afraid that my role does not give me responsibility for solving problems like that'; 'This committee does not deal with those issues'.

Second, this alerts us to the wide range of methods and techniques available to the change agent, and also to the range of potential responses from the targets of political tactics. While the resource-based view regards power as 'one way', something that 'we use on you', the concepts of non-decision-making and mobilization of bias mean that power is a more fluid, dynamic, shifting, and malleable resource. Determining an appropriate strategy requires personal skill, knowledge of the context, judgement, and creativity. A broad understanding of the embedded nature of power relations, along with the property and (interpersonal) relational dimensions, exposes the scope for such creativity.

Third, this alerts us to the idea that some 'textbook tidy' definitions of power may not adequately reflect what happens in practice. Power becomes a slippery concept when its users can claim that they are just applying custom and practice, or accepted norms, or 'the rules and regulations', or precedent in the interests of consistency. What may be defined as the exercise of power from one perspective may be defined as commonplace and routine from another. Suggesting how these ambiguities can be exploited, Gerald Ferris et al. (2002a) note that it is often useful for managers to avoid being seen as acting politically; skilled political actors disguise such intentions.

Power across the organization

In most organizations, different sections or units have different levels of power. Why? Groups or departments that are responsible for dealing with issues that are key to the organization's performance and survival, or solving urgent problems, or dealing with a crisis, tend to be more powerful than those whose contributions are less critical. Research and development may be vital in developing new products to get ahead of the competition. In a recession, however, when consumer spending is low, marketing and sales may be more important. The finance function in most organizations is always high priority, and they tend to have high levels of power and influence over key decisions.

This is known as the **strategic contingencies theory** of organizational power (David Hickson et al., 1971; Henry Mintzberg, 1983). Strategic contingencies are events that must take place if the organization is to survive and succeed. If your department handles these contingencies, then it will have more power and influence. A department's ability to deal with strategic contingencies depends on five factors: dependency creation, financial resources, centrality of activities, non-substitutability, and ability to reduce uncertainty. These factors overlap, and the more of them a department possesses, the greater the power that it will exert in the organization.

- **strategic contingencies theory**: a perspective which argues that the most powerful individuals and departments are those best able to deal effectively with the issues that are most critical to the organization's survival and performance

1. Dependency creation: a department is powerful if other units and departments depend on it, for materials, information, resources, and advice. The receiving department is always in an inferior power position.
2. Financial resources: a department's ability to control financial resources increases power. Departments thus compete with each other for new projects that have large budgets.
3. Centrality: centrality concerns the degree to which a department's activities are critical to achieving the organization's goals. Departments such as training, payroll management, human resources, and advertising can often be outsourced, without jeopardizing the organization's performance.
4. Non-substitutability: a department is more powerful where its work cannot easily be done by another department. Individuals and sections increase power by handling specialized work that needs high levels of skill and knowledge.
5. Uncertainty reduction: those with the ability to reduce uncertainty can gain significant reputations and positions of influence, by providing clear definitions of problems and solutions, thus restoring an otherwise confused situation.

Shifting the balance of organizational power: the case of human resource management

REINVENTING HR

We believe the time is right to accelerate the reinvention of HR as a hard-edged function capable of understanding the drivers of strategy and deploying talent in support of it – most importantly as a result of the availability of new technological tools that unleash the power of data analytics. (Frank Bafaro et al., 2017, p. 2)

Why are some employees more likely to leave the organization? Will this reorganization of work improve productivity? Why are some groups more creative than others? Will our new rewards strategy improve quality of customer service, or have the opposite effect? The answers to questions such as these traditionally draw on experience, judgement, and intuition. However, big data and human capital analytics (or human capital metrics) enable human resource management (HR) to demonstrate, with quantifiable measures, the impact that HR policies and practices have on individual and group behaviour and performance. HR analytics can help to identify cause and effect relationships, and also to predict the consequences of introducing new policies and practices.

In parallel with the contribution of social media to 'new power', therefore, technology developments are shifting the internal balance of power across organizations. Big data and data analytics don't sound like HR terms, but human capital analytics is transforming the way in which this traditionally less powerful function operates. HR has until now relied on soft, subjective, qualitative information to support policy and practice: job satisfaction, engagement, commitment, culture, and so on. With the growing availability of large amounts of work-related data, it is now possible to analyse in detail the drivers of employee behaviour and performance. HR policies and practice can now be based on hard, objective, quantitative data. Relying on subjective judgement, HR has lacked power compared to other management functions, especially finance.

For example, a leading American healthcare organization had problems with nurse recruitment and turnover. These problems were affecting patients, and revenues were falling. When HR analysed the tenure of nursing staff, they found interesting correlations between length of service, pay, and performance. This pointed to the cause of the problem and a solution. Management increased the pay for nurses early in their careers and adjusted the total rewards for those with longer career paths. As a result, the company retained more early-tenure, high performing nurses. Implementing this approach across the company led to an increase in employee engagement, and productivity rose by around $100 million (Bafaro et al., 2017, p. 1). Other examples of the benefits of human capital analytics include:

1 A bank faced the problem of identifying high potential employees. What employee profile, they wanted to know, best predicts performance? Analytics revealed that branch and team structures were the best predictors. This challenged traditional assumptions about the importance of factors such as academic achievement.
2 A professional services company developed automated CV (curriculum vitae, or résumé) screening to reduce the costs of processing large numbers of job applicants. However, they also had a policy of hiring more women. The HR algorithm successfully identified candidates most likely to be hired, and rejected those with little or no chance of being recruited. Costs were reduced, and the algorithm proved that achieving gender diversity did not depend on human screening.
3 An insurance company with high staff turnover offered bonuses to encourage staff to stay, but these had little effect. Data analytics were then used to profile high-risk staff. This showed, again contrary to traditional assumptions, that those in small teams with longer periods between promotions, and with lower performing managers, were most likely to leave. The solution involved scrapping the bonuses and spending that money instead on offering more opportunities for development, combined with support from stronger managers. Performance and retention both improved. (Henri de Romrée et al., 2016)

Consider how human capital analytics changes the strategic contingencies of the HR function:

1 Dependency creation: other departments rely on HR analytics to provide them with information about employee performance and turnover intentions, and to assess the impact of new policies and working arrangements.

2 Financial resources: HR can say which policies and initiatives generate the greatest returns for the business, and also identify practices that should be discontinued or amended because they are not cost-effective.
3 Centrality: with hard data on what drives business performance, and what does not, the HR function becomes central to the achievement of organizational objectives.
4 Non-substitutability: it may be possible for an organization to outsource its HR analytics, bypassing the internal HR function, but interpreting big data analyses will benefit from good local knowledge.
5 Uncertainty reduction: big data and predictive analytics can take a lot of the guesswork out of implementing new policies and practices, thus reducing the uncertainty of decisions based on judgement and intuition.

Thanks to the developments in computing that have given us big data and data analytics, HR can now measure the impact of policy and practice on organizational performance, as well as identify cause and effect relationships, and better predict the consequences of introducing new policies and practice. HR thus becomes a more hard-edged function, increasing its relative power in the organization, and giving it increased influence in the boardroom.

Power and influence: change agent as compliance professional

How can we use power to get others to do what we want? Power is defined as exerting one's will and overcoming resistance to produce the results that we desire. Those over whom power is exercised may resent this. However, it is also possible to achieve the desired results in such a way that those affected are not aware, and are only occasionally resentful, and may even be grateful. Andrzej Huczynski (2004) defines **influence** as one person's ability to affect another's attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours. Influence can be achieved without force or 'pulling rank'. When this is successful, the person who is influenced often believes that they have not been pressured into doing something, but are acting in their own best interests.

- **influence**: the process of affecting someone else's attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours, without using coercion or formal position, such that the other person believes that they are acting in their own best interests

The use of influence tactics has attracted a lot of research interest, and we will consider two influential perspectives. One is based on the work of David Kipnis et al. (1984), who identified eight categories of influence tactic: assertiveness, ingratiation, rational appeal, sanctions, exchange, upward appeal, blocking, and coalition (Table 1.3). Kipnis and colleagues note that managers do not exercise influence for self-interest and enjoyment, but in order to drive change – to promote new ideas, encourage others to work more effectively, or introduce new working practices, for example.

Table 1.3 Influence tactics

assertiveness	Order the person to do it. Point out that the rules demand it. Keep reminding them about what is required.
ingratiation	Make the request politely and humbly. Act in a friendly way and be complimentary before asking. Sympathize with any hardships they may face.
rational appeal	Write a detailed justification. Present relevant information in support. Explain the reasoning behind your request.
sanctions	Threaten to get them fired. Threaten to block their promotion. Threaten them with a poor performance evaluation.
exchange	Offer an exchange of favours – mutual backscratching. Remind them of favours that you have done for them in the past.
upward appeal	Get higher level management to intervene in your support. Send the person to speak to your boss.
blocking	Threaten to stop working with the person. Ignore the person and stop being friendly. Withhold collaboration until they do what you want.
coalition	Get the support of colleagues to support your request. Make the request at a formal meeting where others will support you.

From their study of American, Australian, and British managers, Kipnis et al. (1984) identified four types of manager based on their patterns of use of these tactics:

1 *Bystanders* rarely use any of these influence tactics, have low organizational power, have limited personal and organizational objectives, and are frequently dissatisfied.
2 *Shotguns* use all of these influence tactics all the time, have unfulfilled goals, and are inexperienced in their job.
3 *Captives* use one or two 'favourite' tactics, habitually, and with limited effectiveness.
4 *Tacticians* use rational appeal frequently, make average use of other tactics, tend to achieve their objectives, have high organizational power, and are usually satisfied.

Discussing what he calls 'the science of getting what you ask for', Robert Cialdini (2008; 2013) identifies six principles of influence by observing the 'compliance professionals' who persuade other people for a living: salespeople, fund-raisers, advertisers, political lobbyists, cult recruiters, and confidence tricksters. He shows how compliance professionals exploit the socialized responses that we automatically make to familiar cues. Anyone can learn these techniques.

1 *Reciprocity*: we are more likely to comply with a request from someone who has previously given us a gift, favour, or concession.

We have a socially trained sense of obligation, to give 'something in return', even when the gift is unsolicited. Survey researchers include small payments to increase questionnaire response rates; restaurant staff increase tips by giving customers sweets with their bills. One version of this approach is *the door-in-the-face* technique. The influencer begins with an extreme request: join a long-term blood donor programme. This is usually rejected. The influencer then makes the request that they intended: make a one-off donation. The influencer has made a concession, and expects a concession from the target in return. This is also known as the 'reciprocal concessions' tactic.

2 *Social validation*: we are more likely to comply with a request, or to adopt a behaviour, that is consistent with what others are thinking or doing.

If other people think it is correct, then we tend to agree. If others are doing it (driving fast), then we feel justified in doing the same. Bartenders 'salt' their jar of tips to show that tipping is 'appropriate'. Church ushers use the same method, and evangelical preachers use 'ringers' who are briefed to 'spontaneously' come forward at predetermined moments during the service. Another tactic is *the list technique*. The influencer makes a request after the target has seen a list of others who have already complied (donated, joined, purchased); the longer the list, the greater the impact.

3 *Commitment/consistency*: we are more likely to comply with a request which leads to actions consistent with our previous acts and commitments.

Consistency is linked to intellect, rationality, honesty, and integrity, and tends to be valued. If I can get you to commit to something (meet me for coffee), then it will be easier to persuade you to do something else that is consistent with that prior commitment (join me for dinner). Doorstep salespeople use *the four walls technique* to gain permission to enter. They ask a series of questions to which your answers are likely to be 'yes'. To be consistent with earlier answers, you have to agree to the final – crucial – question. The double-glazing salesperson asks you: (1) Do you want to cut your heating bills? (2) Do you think that cutting down on drafts will make your home warmer? (3) Don't you agree that poorly fitting windows are a source of many drafts? (4) Well, you'll be interested in our new product range, which we are offering at a very good price. Can I come in and show you?

There are three other techniques that exploit our desire for consistency. *The foot-in-the-door technique* involves the influencer first asking for a small favour that is almost certain to be granted (wear a small pin to promote a charity), followed by a bigger related request (donate cash). Those who agree to the small request are more likely to agree to the larger one. *The bait-and-switch technique* is illustrated by retailers who advertise goods (e.g. furniture) at a particularly low price, but when the customers show up, the products are either poor quality, or they are sold out. Customers have made a commitment to purchasing at that store, and are more likely to consider alternative items without going elsewhere. *The low-ball technique* involves persuading someone to buy something – let's say a car – at a low price, or by offering an inflated trade-in value for their old vehicle. Then a calculation error is discovered, or an assessor disallows the trade-in value. Having already committed to the purchase, most customers will go ahead, even at the higher price.

4 *Friendship/liking*: we are more likely to comply with requests from friends, or from others whom we like.

Charities recruit volunteers to collect donations in their local area. Compliance professionals as strangers, however, have to find ways to get us to like them, and use several techniques to achieve this. *Physical attractiveness*: attractive individuals are generally more persuasive.

Those whom we believe to be attractive are also attributed with traits such as talent, kindness, honesty, and intelligence. *Similarity*: we tend to like, and to be persuaded more readily by, those who are similar to us in their opinions, background, lifestyle, personality, and dress. In one study, a survey response rate was doubled by giving the person sending the questionnaire a name similar to that of the respondent: Bob Gregar and Cindy Johanson sent survey questionnaires to Robert Greer and Cynthia Johnson. *Compliments*: praise encourages liking, unless it is obvious that the flatterer's intent is manipulative. *Cooperation*: cooperation enhances compliance. Salespeople often appear to 'do battle' on the customer's behalf with a remote 'villain' of a sales manager. This cooperation in a shared outcome leads to liking, which promotes sales.

5 *Scarcity*: we are more likely to comply with requests that will lead to the acquisition of opportunities that are scarce.

Opportunities tend to be more highly valued when they are less available, and items that are difficult to possess are 'better' than items that can be easily acquired, including information. With *the limited number tactic*, customers are told that products, services, or membership opportunities are in short supply and will not last long: 'Hurry, buy now'. With *the deadline technique*, an official time limit is put on the opportunity to purchase: 'Offer available for one week only'. This may be accompanied by a claim that the item will either be unavailable, or become more expensive, after the deadline has expired.

6 *Authority*: we are more likely to comply with requests from those in positions of legitimate authority.

Position power can be very persuasive. The title 'doctor' often commands blind obedience to dangerous instructions, such as administering an unsafe level of a drug. People are more likely to follow instructions from a security guard in uniform, and an expensive business suit has a similar effect. *The bank examiner scheme* involves a person in a suit coming to your house, claiming to be a bank official investigating irregular transactions by a local bank teller. Will you help? All you have to do is come along to the branch and withdraw your savings from that teller's window so that they can be caught in the act. Then, pass your money to the uniformed security guard, who will return it to your account (allegedly). Disreputable tactics like this have been widely publicized, but people are still caught out. This should not, however, prevent the change agent from using position power to drive an initiative.

INFLUENCING FROM THE MIDDLE: HOW TO WIN SUPPORT FOR NEW IDEAS

Susan Ashford and James Detert (2015, p. 73) argue that 'Organizations don't prosper unless managers in the middle ranks identify and promote the need for change'. However, when it comes to sharing those ideas, middle managers are often discouraged by the top leadership style ('if an idea was any good, we would have already thought of it'), and valuable opportunities

(Continued)

are missed. Ashford and Detert asked middle managers to describe their experiences of selling three kinds of ideas: new products, processes or markets; improvements to existing products and processes; and better ways to meet employees' needs. This helped them to identify seven influence tactics that middle managers use to attract senior executive attention and resources:

Tactic	Base your approach on these questions
tailor your pitch	Where does my audience stand on this issue? What does my audience find most convincing or compelling?
frame the issue	How can I connect my issue to organizational priorities? How can I best describe its benefits? How can I link it to other issues receiving attention? How can I highlight an opportunity for the organization?
manage emotions	How can I use emotions to generate positive responses? How can I manage my audience's emotional responses?
get the timing right	What is the best moment to be heard? Can I 'catch the wave' of a trend, or tap into what's going on outside? What is the right time in the decision-making process to raise my issue?
involve others	Which allies from my network can help me sell my issue? Who are potential blockers, and how can I persuade them to support me? Who are fence-sitters, and how can I convince them that my issue matters?
adhere to norms	Should I use a formal or a casual approach, or a combination?
suggest solutions	Am I suggesting a viable solution? If not, am I proposing a way to discover one, instead of just highlighting the problem?

Ashford and Detert offer three other pieces of advice. First, choose your audience; your immediate boss may not be the best place to start. Second, use several tactics rather than just one or two; they are more powerful in combination. Finally, choose your battles; some ideas are too difficult to sell.

If you want to drive change, you will usually be asked for the business case. But be aware that a good business case on its own is rarely enough to win support. Your project is competing with others in the organization, and you need to be able to persuade colleagues to back your ideas. With regard to a particular initiative, think about who you need to influence. How will you sell your ideas? Which influence tactics will you use? How will you tailor your approach to each of your influence targets?

Power tells, powertalking, and power priming

The influencing techniques discussed in the last section provide the change agent – and leaders and managers in general – with a range of tools of persuasion. However, we influence people in other ways, through our appearance and behaviour, how we speak, and how we feel. In this section, therefore, we explore the nature of power tells, powertalking, and power priming.

Power tells

Psychologists use the term ‘power tells’ to describe the various signs and clues that indicate how powerful someone is – or how powerful they want to be. Power tells are one aspect of impression management – how we control the perception that others have of us. Do others see us as friendly or hostile, outgoing or shy, powerful or powerless? We communicate these aspects of our character through a range of signals or ‘tells’, also called body language. If someone disagrees with us, they will frown, cross their arms, and look away. If someone wants to be friends, they will look straight at us, smile, and maintain eye contact. These signals are not difficult to read. But they are often ‘given off’ unconsciously. When it is important, however, we need to be in conscious control of our body language; we need consciously to manage our impression.

How do we signal to others that we are powerful? The power tells of dominant individuals include:

- for men: manspreading – sitting and standing with legs far apart
- for women: putting a bag on the seat beside you so that nobody can sit there
- occupying the space around you by placing your hands on your hips
- using open postures and invasive hand gestures
- smiling less, because a smile is an appeasement gesture
- establishing visual dominance by looking away from the other person while speaking
- speaking first, and dominating the conversation afterwards
- using a lower voice tone, speaking more slowly
- interrupting others, and resisting being interrupted.

The power tells of submissive individuals include:

- modifying your speech to sound more like the person to whom you are talking
- frequent hesitations, using lots of ‘ums’ and ‘ers’
- adopting closed postures, legs crossed, arms folded, looking away
- self-comfort gestures such as ‘holding hands with yourself’, touching your face and hair
- blushing, coughing, dry mouth, heavy breathing, heavy swallowing, increased heart rate, lip biting, rapid blinking, and sweating are ‘leakage tells’, which reveal stress and anxiety.

One way to get more power, therefore, is to look more powerful. This approach carries risks; others could find out that you are not so powerful after all. Knowledge of power tells also means that we can ‘read’ the signals of others, and begin to assess their power, while actively controlling our own ‘tells’.

Gerben Van Kleef et al. (2011) report a series of experiments showing that those who violate social norms are often seen as more powerful by others. Norms violated in these studies included helping oneself to someone else’s coffee, violating bookkeeping rules, dropping cigarette ash on the floor, and putting feet on a table. Norm violation is another ‘tell’. We might expect that powerholders who break the rules will find their status lowered, but that is not always the case. Powerful people may feel that ‘the rules’ do not apply to them, and they are thus less inhibited. Other norms to which these findings could apply include putting your feet on the opposite seat on the train, the boss who comes into your office without knocking first, taking more cookies from a common plate, interrupting others, having a loud conversation in a movie theatre, and answering your phone during a meeting.

HOW TO LOOK POWERFUL: THE RED SNEAKERS EFFECT

Janneke Oostrom and Richard Ronay (2018) studied how the way that we dress can affect recruitment decisions. One of the first things that recruiters notice is what you wear to the interview. Dress signals a number of your characteristics such as power, status, and competence. For a job interview, we are expected to conform with social norms, so we adopt formal business dress to make a good impression. But what happens if we do not conform, if we turn up in, say, jeans and red sneakers?

The researchers recruited 80 participants in the Netherlands. They were shown a job advertisement for a human resource manager job at a professional services company. They were also shown CVs that outlined each candidate's education, work experience, knowledge, skills, and abilities. The CVs included a picture of the applicant. (As norms regarding dress style differ for men and women, and are clearer for men, the applicants in this study were all male.) The quality of the candidates' CVs varied; some were weak, and some were strong. The photos showed candidates wearing different styles of clothing. Conforming candidates wore a black suit, black leather shoes, a white shirt, and a blue tie. Non-conforming applicants wore a grey jacket, striped sweater, white shirt, blue tie, dark blue jeans – and sneakers.

Participants were asked to rate the power of the applicant, based on four 'power statements': this person is influential; has a leadership position; is in charge of subordinates; enjoys considerable authority. They were also asked whether they would recommend hiring the candidate. This is what the researchers found:

- Candidates who dressed in a non-conformist way may be perceived more positively than those dressed in a more conforming manner. This is known as 'the red sneakers effect' – if you are confident enough to 'dress down', then you must be competent and highly regarded.
- Red sneakers are a power tell. Deliberate non-conformity was seen as indicating that candidates had the power, influence, and status that allowed them to ignore social norms and behave as they liked. This explains why Mark Zuckerberg can wear what he likes – 'I am successful so I can afford to dress in a non-conforming style'. This also explains why he wore a formal business suit when he appeared before a US congressional hearing in April 2018.
- Candidates with strong CVs were seen as powerful no matter how they dressed, and candidates with weak CVs were unlikely to be hired if they dressed in a non-conformist way.
- You will only get away with a non-conforming dress style if you have a strong CV that confirms your competence and qualifications.

Power talking

Powerful individuals – female and male – or those who are seeking to give others the impression that they are powerful, reveal this in their conversation style. They dominate conversations, give less personal information, show less emotional display, and assert their status by interrupting, speaking firmly and in detail, and by giving opinions, suggestions, information, and disagreements.

We 'manage' our conversations through conscious and unconscious verbal and non-verbal signals and questioning techniques that tell others when one has finished speaking, and when it is somebody else's turn. These signals also reveal agreement, friendship, dispute, and dislike, emotions that in turn shape the further response of the listener. Normally, we send these signals unconsciously or habitually, but awareness of the methods being used allows us to bring them under conscious control. This can often be to our advantage. Therapists and counsellors, for example, control conversations in ways that allow their clients to articulate their problems and to work towards identifying solutions. Managers holding selection, appraisal, and promotion interviews need to understand conversation control techniques to handle these interactions effectively. We can also use conversation controls to steer others' behaviour. Andrzej Huczynski (2004) describes the 'high power' and 'low power' strategies that signal to others how powerful we are, how powerful we think we are, or how powerful we want others to think we are. Table 1.4 lists powertalking strategies, and Table 1.5 shows low power conversational indicators. Note that powertalking strategies involve normal behaviours.

Table 1.4 Powertalking strategies

positive talk	respond positively, make commitments, have high expectations, be optimistic, avoid conditional phrases, seek creative solutions, look for the benefits
give credit	alter or ignore shortcomings, describe achievements positively, neither apologise nor justify, praise others for their success
learn from experience	say, 'I learned' instead of 'I failed', seek the positive in the face of setbacks, think positive when feeling low, focus on options rather than regrets
accept responsibility	admit your feelings, accept responsibility for your actions, control your use of time
persuade others	emphasize benefits, keep options open, seek ways to improve relationships, focus on the positive, accept the ideas of others
decisive speaking	commit to specific duties and targets, get detailed information, set realistic goals, decide what to say and then say it
tell the truth	avoid suspicious and misleading phrases, say 'no' when you mean 'no', avoid self-criticism, respect those with whom you interact – remembering and using others' names.

Table 1.5 Low power conversational indicators

hedges and qualifiers	'maybe it has some strengths': qualifiers mean avoiding commitment, so you don't have to disagree with someone; you can change your view when you discover theirs
irritators	' . . . you know', 'sort of', 'kinda': these suggest you lack confidence in what you are saying, that you feel the need to apologise, that you lack knowledge and ability
intensifiers	redundant adjectives, like 'really', 'awfully', 'horrendously': these terms lack substance; use more powerful language such as 'remarkably', 'outstanding', 'excellent'
tags	tags are the bits at the end where you say, 'aren't they?', or 'didn't you?'; these turn a decisive statement into an unnecessary question, attempting to please, avoiding conflict
hesitations	'um, er, ah, uhh, well . . .': these suggest the need for time to think, or the fear of 'coming over too strong'; they can signal uncertainty, and encourage interruption
excessive questions	a speech pattern that signals uncertainty and need for attention
others	unnecessary or excessive apologizing, giving irrelevant information, excessive personal disclosure, over-politeness.

Power priming

As well as looking and talking as if we are more powerful, it is also possible to make ourselves *feel* more powerful and self-confident. And when we look and feel powerful, we also tend to act as if we are indeed powerful. Research has shown that we can feel and behave like a more powerful person by using a technique called **power priming** (Adam Galinsky and Maurice Schweitzer, 2015; Amy Cuddy, 2016; Cuddy et al., 2018).

- **power priming**: the process of making yourself feel more powerful, which in turn allows you to feel less stressed, and to behave as a more confident, persuasive, and powerful person

To become power-primed, think of a time when you had power over others, and remember how that felt. You can also be powerless-primed; think of a time when you lacked power. There are two ways to reinforce your power priming. First, adopt a power posture, standing straight, hands on hips, feet shoulder-width apart. The second method is to listen to power anthems; this technique is used by Serena Williams, who can often be seen wearing headphones when walking onto the tennis court.

In one experiment, students were first asked to write about a time when they either had power or lacked power (Galinsky and Schwitzer, 2015). They were then asked to write an application letter for a job that had been advertised in a well-known newspaper. Another group of students was then asked to evaluate these application letters – some power-primed, and some powerless-primed – and to decide if they would appoint the person. The student judges were much more likely to hire the power-primed applicants. In another experiment, business school graduates who wrote about a positive personal power experience before a job interview were accepted 68 per cent of the time, compared with a normal acceptance rate of 47 per cent. Only 26 per cent of the graduates who wrote about a time when they lacked power were selected; the power-primed applicants were rated as more persuasive.

Power priming can help us to deal with challenging and stressful settings. Cuddy (2016) describes a study in which people who were asked to hold a power posture for a short time before a job interview were more likely to be offered the job than those who had been asked to sit in a 'weak' posture, hunched, holding their neck, with twisted legs. Galinsky and Schwitzer (2015) describe a colleague who, when applying for university posts, was asked to make presentations to large audiences. She was interviewed by two prestigious universities, but neither offered her a job. She then wrote a power prime for herself, and got job offers from the next four top-tier universities to which she applied.

Reputation as power base

The concept of power base is a central one in this area. We explained two frameworks, identifying five and eight power bases respectively. There is at least one other power base that has been largely overlooked. This concerns your *reputation*. This is fundamental to leadership and management roles in general, and to the role of the change agent in particular. Managing your reputation is at the heart of the argument of this book concerning the constructive exercise of power and political behaviour.

COMPETENCE AND POWER

Competence leads to power because competence itself is a valued resource; a strategic position in a social network leads to power because it gives the individual access to information and control over access to people; having a competent-looking face contributes to power because it gives the impression that the individual possesses special skills or abilities; and personality traits such as dominance contribute to power because they are associated with social and leadership skills, as well as the enactment of behaviours that heighten the individual's reputation for competence. (Cameron Anderson and Sebastien Brion, 2014, p. 75)

Reputation is defined not just in terms of the opinions of others, or the regard in which you are held. It is also defined by what you have done and achieved, on your actions and outcomes. In other words, you do not simply have 'a reputation'; you have a reputation *for* something. This dependence on outcomes means that reputation as a power base is related to, but distinct from, position, expert, and referent power, whose sources lie not with achievements, but with title, knowledge, and personality.

Reputation can be seen simultaneously as a personal, relational, and embedded property. Reputation is commonly considered to be the property of the individual, an attribute that you possess, developed through your actions over time. Reputation is also held in the opinions of others, based on their perceptions of those actions and their assessments of the outcomes, making this also a relational property; your reputation is what others believe your reputation to be. In reaching decisions on how to act in particular circumstances, those individuals concerned with reputation must constantly ask themselves, 'how will this be seen and judged'. Reputations also become institutionalized, captured in the anecdotes, jokes, stories, myths, and legends that surround key individuals and their contributions (negative and positive). Reputations that have become embedded in this way are 'learned' by newcomers who can hold opinions of individuals who they have never met.

While reputations tend to be built gradually over time, they are fragile and can be reversed by a single act or a series of related incidents. This is seen in the careers of national politicians, where decades of commitment to party and cause are sidelined by the headline revealing some indiscretion such as a relationship, a habit, an expenses claim, or an offensive joke told at a private gathering but overheard by a journalist. Such actions may have no direct impact on the person's ability, but their trustworthiness becomes suspect, their judgement is questioned, and their career can be terminated.

Your reputation depends on how your actions are perceived, understood, interpreted, and judged. Those judgements sit with the observer, but one of the ways in which observers' perceptions can be influenced is through the way in which behaviour is described, through the accounts that change agents provide for their actions – sometimes called 'spin' (see box). The concept of labelling behaviour like this has interesting consequences. For illustration, let us say we 'catch you out' in some devious, underhand, cunning power play to discredit a colleague. If we are able to make this accusation 'stick', your reputation could be damaged, colleagues may be reluctant to trust you again, cooperation will be withheld, promotion chances will be blighted, and we can make your life unpleasant – should you decide to stay. However, if you are able to refute this accusation, then your reputation could not only be saved, but enhanced. Your counter-claim could run something like this:

> Don't be ridiculous. This was not a power play. This was a routine attempt to persuade someone of the logic of the case, to bring them round to my way of thinking which, by the way, has broad agreement across the organization. And this person was not only going to damage the change initiative, but also damage the futures of colleagues who would benefit (through improved job security, quality of working life, and so on). In any case, this person was acting against the change out of purely personal motives. I was just doing my job.

The essence of political behaviour lies not just in tactics and techniques, but in the ways in which such behaviour is accounted for and represented by the players in the game. Accounting involves the 'management of meaning', which is achieved through symbolic actions, through the careful use of language, and through the stories or narratives that we use to explain ourselves. The ways in which we construct and present those accounts or narratives is another form of impression management.

In other words, power often belongs to the best storytellers. We are dealing not so much with the legitimation of interests and demands, but with the presentation of those interests and the legitimation of the tactics used in their pursuit. Power, in this view, is the ability to impose one's interpretation on events in competition with the meanings offered by others. The key political behaviours thus lie in *labelling* actions as political, in *challenging* such classifications, and in *justifying* such actions when necessary and appropriate with a plausible *account* in the circumstances.

SPIN: POWER PLAYS AND POLITICAL TACTICS

Spin is a French political drama series created for television by Dan Franck, Frederic Tellier, Charline de Lépine, and Emmanuel Daucé. The first episode was broadcast in January 2012, and there have been three series since then, with the third broadcast in the UK in 2017. All three series are available on DVD. The French title, *Les hommes de l'ombre*, means 'shadow men', who in colloquial English are known as 'spin doctors'. In this narrative, there are also women 'in the shadows'. The two competing spin doctors, Simon Kapita and Ludovic Desmeuze, each seeking to promote their own candidate, are played by Bruno Wolkowich and Grégory Fitoussi respectively. The action revolves in and around the Élysée Palace, which is the official residence of the French president. With much intrigue, jostling for political gain, power, and influence, this is an excellent example of 'realist fiction'.

As you watch these programmes, identify examples of the following power plays and political tactics:

Presentation

One of the main responsibilities of the 'shadow men' is to put a positive 'spin' on actions, events, and decisions. This means giving a plausible account or explanation to 'sell' an idea or a candidate by presenting them in a good light. Spin is central to damage limitation, and to saving face, to persuade others that things are not as bad as they might appear. But when does 'spin' become 'lies'?

Relationships

Relationships are deliberately cultivated and sustained for personal and political reasons, such as an exchange of favours. Relationships may appear to be friendships, until one member finds that the relationship is no longer to their advantage, or could even be damaging to them. Relationships between political players are, therefore, often unstable and constantly shifting.

Alliances

Players in the politics game reach mutual agreements to support each other in the face of shared threats. Alliances only last as long as there is mutual advantage to be gained. Alliances are quickly abandoned if that would give political advantage to one or more players. Alliances therefore, like relationships, are unstable and constantly shifting.

Blackmail

One way in which to exert effective influence over the actions and decisions of others is to threaten to reveal sensitive information about them, or perhaps about a close family member. Knowing that damaging information could be given, say, to a journalist, can often ensure rapid and unquestioning compliance with the blackmailer's requests.

Revenge

Those who 'spin' information, exploit relationships, abandon alliances, and use blackmail as an influencing strategy, not surprisingly make themselves vulnerable to revenge attacks. Players in this political game must therefore always 'watch their backs', and maintain a degree of 'health paranoia'.

Information and the media

Information is a powerful resource in these political games. Although information may remain personal, or be confined to small groups, the media can be used to publicize selected stories, and to 'bury' or to 'spin' others. Political players often have relationships and alliances with journalists.

The conduct and justification of organization politics is a language game, as well as a game of strategies, tactics, and behaviours. Jeffrey Pfeffer (1992, p. 190) describes this activity as 'framing', which refers to the need to appear reasonable in context. Thus, 'what looks reasonable, or ridiculous, depends on the context – on how it is framed in terms of what has preceded it and the language that is used to present it'. In our culture, decisions must *appear* to be rational, even though the players involved typically know this is not a wholly accurate representation. As Pfeffer (1992) observes:

> All organizations strive for the appearance of rationality and the use of proper procedures, which include using information and analysis to justify decisions, even if this information and analysis is mustered after the fact to ratify a decision that has been made for other reasons. (p. 248)

> Thus, in many instances, individuals in organizations do not seek out information in order to make a decision, but rather, they amass information so that the decision will seem to have been made in the 'correct' fashion – i.e. on the basis of information rather than uninformed preferences or hunches. (p. 250)
>
> Because of the need for the appearance, if not reality, of rational decision processes, analysis and information are important as strategic weapons in battles involving power and influence. In these contests, the ability to mobilize powerful outside experts, with credibility and the aura of objectivity, is an effective strategy. (p. 254)

Does this reduce the political aspects of the work of the change agent to appearances, to surface characteristics, play acting and illusion, to a devious combination of 'frontwork' and 'backstaging'? The significance given to accounting, to form over substance, illusion over reality, may appear to be a cosmetic approach, with negative implications for personal job and career satisfaction.

It is important to remember the substantive, unavoidable, and necessary shaping role of power and politics in change. We are dealing with skilful behaviour that can have positive as well as negative individual and organizational consequences. We are dealing with a range of political styles, from coercion at one extreme, to a variety of less aggressive methods. We are faced with the need to represent our goals and behaviours, and the goals and behaviours of others, in a manner that promotes the legitimacy of one and, where appropriate, the unacceptability of the other. We are playing a game of symbols and language in which what one says and how (and when and where and to whom) one says it, can be as significant as what one does, and how one does it. The change agent concerned with implementing an initiative, with making a mark, with making a difference, with career progression, with organizational success, can only escape from this game by pursuing some other career.

In the next chapter, we will look more closely at political behaviour – at power in action – in the moves and tactics that are involved, and the mix of benefits and costs. We will challenge the negative stereotype that politics has, and suggest that those who are politically skilled, and who use political behaviour in positive and constructive ways, can benefit their organizations as well as their own reputations and careers.

WELCOME TO THE REAL WORLD

So, welcome to the real world. It may not be the world we want, but it's the world we have. You won't get far, and neither will your strategic plans, if you can't build and use power. Some of the people competing for advancement or standing in the way of your organization's agenda will bend the rules of fair play or ignore them entirely. Don't bother complaining about this or wishing things were different. Part of your job is to know how to prevail in the political battles you will face. (Pfeffer, 2010, p. 92)

Follow through

Power in a changing environment (based on John Barbuto, 2000)

The object of this exercise is to explore how change in the environment can affect the balance of power across the organization, strengthening the power of some areas, and weakening others.

Briefing

1. Form groups and nominate a spokesperson. Read the description of your organization below.
2. Read each of the five environmental change scenarios (below) in order. Each is separate from the others. Make reasonable assumptions as you explore these issues. For each scenario, decide:

   a. What types of activities are likely to increase/become more important in the company as a result?
   b. Which five staff power bases will *increase* most in the light of this new condition – and why?

3. Each group's spokesperson presents and justifies their conclusions to the whole group.

Your organization

Your medium-sized company manufactures portable, petrol-driven, electric power generators that are sold to domestic and office customers, often for use in emergencies	
Advertising expert (m)	Chartered accountant (m)
Chief financial officer (f)	General manager (m)
Operations manager (f)	Marketing manager (f)
Industrial engineer (m)	Computer programmer (f)
Product designer (m)	Industrial chemist (m)
Public relations expert (m)	In-house legal advisor (m)
Company trainer (m)	Human resource manager (f)

(m) = male; (f) = female

Five environmental change scenarios

1. The existing small batch production of generators will be replaced by a state-of-the-art, automated assembly line.
2. New laws about engine and factory emissions are being passed by the European Parliament.
3. Sales are greatly reduced, and the industrial sector seems to be shrinking.
4. The company is planning to go international in the next year or two.
5. The Equality Commission is pressing companies to establish better male–female balance in senior posts and is threatening to 'name-and-shame' companies.

Personal power bases: assess and build

The object of this exercise is to assess the strength of your power bases, and to decide what steps you can take to strengthen your power in particular areas.

1 Working alone, carry out a realistic assessment of your current managerial and/or professional power bases using the grid below. Estimate your current power as high, medium, or low in each area. Then select two 'priority' bases where you feel that it would be personally valuable, and practically possible, to strengthen your power base.

My power bases	High, medium, low?	Actions to strengthen
reward		
coercion		
authority		
referent		
expert		
information		
affiliation		
group		
reputation		

2 At your table or syndicate, share your assessments and priorities. As a group, identify one power base that all or most of you have prioritized, or in which you have a shared interest. Brainstorm the practical steps, as many as you can identify, that you could each take to develop power in that area.

3 Nominate a spokesperson to share your advice on strengthening that power base with the rest of the group.

This assessment and discussion should demonstrate that one does not have to take the strength, or weakness, of existing power bases as given. Combining the personal, relational, and embedded views of power, we can see how in practical ways power bases can be strengthened (and, of course, weakened) through particular actions, and also by events occurring in a given context. Power in any organizational setting is fluid, rather than static, depending on circumstances and actions over time. It is helpful to remember that the power bases of others are also fluid, for the same reasons.