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Power Failure in Management Circuits Rosetta Moss Canter power is America's last dirty word. It is easier to talk about money and much easier to talk about sex than it is to talk about power. People who have it deny it; people who want it do not want to appear to hunger for it; and people who engage in its machinations do so secretly. Yet, because it turns out to be a critical element in effective managerial behavior, power should come out from undercover.

Having searched for years for those styles or skills that would identify capable organization leaders, many analysts, like me, are rejecting individual traits or situational appropriateness as key and finding the sources of a leader's real power _ Access to resources and information and the ability to act quickly make it possible to accomplish more and to pass on more resources and information to subordinates. Boor this reason, people tend to prefer bosses with " clout'.

When employees perceive their manager as influential upward and outward, their Status is enhanced by association and they generally have high morale and feel less critical or resistant to their boss. More powerful leaders are also more likely to delegate (they are too busy to do it all themselves), to reward Allen, and to build a team that places subordinates in significant positions. Powerlessness, in contrast, tends to breed bossiness rather than true leadership. In large organizations, at least, it is powerlessness that often creates ineffective, desultory management and petty, dictatorial, rules minded managerial styles.

Accountability without power responsibility for results without the resources to get them creates frustration and failure. People who see themselves as weak and powerless and find their subordinates resisting or discounting them tend to use more punishing tactics to influence. If organizational power can "ennoble", then, recent research shows, organizational powerlessness can (with apologies to Lord Acton) "corrupt." So perhaps power, in the organization at least, does not deserve such a bad reputation.

Rather than connoting only dominance, control and oppression, power can mean efficacy and capacity something managers and executives need to move the organizations toward its goals. Power in organizations is analogous in simple terms to physical power: it is the ability to immobilize resources (human and material) to get things done. The true sign of power, then, is accomplishment not fear, terror, or tyranny. Where power is "on" the system can be productive; where the power is "off" the system bogs down. Where does power come from?

The effectiveness that power brings evolves from two kinds of capacities: first, access to resources, information, and support necessary to carry out a task; and, second, ability to get cooperation in doing what is necessary. (Figure 1 identifies some symbols of an individual manager's power). Figure 1. Some common symbols of a manager's organizational power (Influence upward and outward) To what extent a manager can intercede favorably on behalf of someone in trouble with the organization. Get a desirable placement for a talented subordinate. Get approval for expenditure beyond the budget.

Get above-average salary increases for subordinates. Get items on the agenda at policy meetings. Get fast access to top decision makers. Get early information about decisions and policy shifts. We can regard the uniquely organizational sources of power as consisting of three "lines": 1. Lines of Supply. Influence outward, over the environment, means that managers have the capacity to bring in the things that their own organizational domain needs materials, money, resources to distribute as rewards and perhaps even prestige. 2. Lines of Information. To be effective, managers need to be "in the knobs" in both the formal and the informal sense. . Lines of Support, In a formal framework, a manager's job parameters need to allow for non-ordinary action, for a show of discretion or exercise of judgment. Thus managers need to know that they can assume innovative, risk-taking activities without having to go through the stifling multi-layered approval process. And, informally, managers need the backing of other important figures in the organization whose tacit approval becomes another resource they bring to their own work unit as well as a sign of the manager's being "in". Note that redemptive power has to do with connection with other parts of a system.

Such systemic aspects of power derive from two sources: job alliances: Power is most easily accumulated even when one has a job that is designed and located to allow discretion (non-routine action permitting flexible, adaptive and creative contributions), recognition (visibility and notice) and relevance (being central to pressing organizational problems). 2. Power also comes when one has relatively close contact with sponsors (higher-level people who confer approval, prestige or backing) peer networks (circles of

acquaintanceship that provide reputation ND information. He grapevine often being faster than formal communication channels) and subordinates (who can be developed to relief managers of some of their burdens and to represent the managers point of view). When managers are in powerful situations, it is easier for them accomplish more. Because the tools are there, they are likely to be highly motivated and in turn, to be able to motivate subordinates. Their activities are more likely to be on target and to net them successes. They can flexibly interpret or shape policy to meet the needs of particular areas, emergent situations, or sudden environmental shifts.

They gain the respect and cooperation that attributed power brings. Subordinates' talents are resources rather than threats. And, because powerful managers have so many lines of connection and thus are oriented outward, they tend to let go of control downward, developing more independently functioning lieutenants. The powerless live in a different world. Lacking the supplies, information, or support to make things happen easily, they may turn instead to the ultimate weapon of those who lack productive power oppressive power: holding others back and punishing with whatever threats they can muster.

Figure 2 - ways organizational factors contribute to power or powerlessness

Factors Generates Power When	Factor Is	Generates Powerlessness When
Factor 15 Rules inherent in the job	Many Predecessors in the job	Established routines
Few Task variety	High Rewards for reliability/predictability	Rewards for unusual performance/innovation
Hostility around use of people	Approvals needed for no routine decisions	Physical location Central Distant
Publicity		

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about job activities Relation of task to current problem areas Peripheral Focus of tasks Outside work unit Inside work unit Interpersonal contact in the job

Contact with senior officials Participation in programs, conferences, meetings Participation in problem-solving task forces Advancement prospects of subordinates Figure 2 - summarize some of the major ways in which variables in the organization and in job design contribute to either power or powerlessness. Positions of powerlessness Longstanding what it takes to have power and recognizing the classic behavior Oh the powerless can immediately help managers make sense out off number of familiar organizational problems that are usually attributed to inadequate people: The ineffectiveness of first-line supervisors,

The petty interest protection and conservatism tot staff professionals. The crises of leadership at the top. Instead of blaming the individuals involved in organizational problems, let us look at the positions people occupy, First-line supervisors Because an employee's most important work relationship is vita his or her supervisor, when many of them talk about ' the company' they mean their immediate boss. Thus a supervisor's behavior is an important determinant Of the average employee's relationship to work and is in itself a critical link in the production chain. Yet I know Of no LIST. Report management entirely satisfied With the reference of its supervisors. Most see them as supervising too closely and not training their people. In one manufacturing company where direct laborers were asked on a survey how they learned their job, on a list of seven possibilities ' from my supervisor" ranked next to last. (Only company training programs ranked worse). Also, it <https://assignbuster.com/pto-summary-power-failure-in-management-circuits-assignment/>

is said that supervisors do not translate company policies into practice for instance, that they do not carry out the right of every employee to frequent performance reviews or to career counseling.

In court cases charging race or sex discrimination, first-line supervisors are recently cited as the “ discriminating official”. And, in studies tot innovative work redesign and quality of work life projects, they often appear as the implied villains; they are the ones who are said to undermine the program or interfere with its effectiveness, In short, they are often seen as “ not sufficiently managerial” A large part of the problem lies in the position itself one that almost universally creates powerlessness. First-line supervisors are “ people in the middle”, and that has been seen as the source of many of their problems.

But by recognizing that first-line supervisors re caught between higher management and workers, we only begin to skim the surface of the problem. There is practically no other organizational category as subject to powerlessness. First, these supervisors may be at a virtual dead end in their careers. Even in companies where the job used to be a stepping stone to higher-level management jobs, it is now common practice to bring in Mambas from the outside for those positions. Thus moving from the ranks of direct labor into supervision may mean, essentially, getting “ stuck” rather than moving upward.

Because employees do not perceive supervisors as eventually joining the leadership irises of the organization, they may see them as lacking the high-level contacts needed to have clout. Indeed, sometimes turnover among

supervisors is so high that workers feel they can outwit and outwit any boss. Second, although they lack clout, with little in the way of support from above, supervisors are forced to administer programs or explain policies that they have no hand in shaping. In one company, as part of a new personnel program supervisors were required to conduct counseling interviews with employees.

But supervisors were not trained to do this and were given no incentives to get involved. Counseling was just another obligation. Then managers suddenly encouraged the workers to bypass their supervisors or to put pressure on them. The personnel staff brought them together and told them to demand such interviews as basic right. If supervisors had not felt powerless before, they did after that squeeze from below, engineered from above. The people they supervise can also make life hard for them in numerous ways. This often happens when a supervisor has himself or herself risen up from the ranks.

Peers that have not made it are resentful or derisive of their former league, whom they now see as trying to lord it over them. Often it is easy for workers to break the rules and let a lot of footings slip. Yet first-line supervisors are frequently judged according to rules and regulations while being limited by other regulations in what disciplinary actions they can take. They often lack the resources to influence or reward people; after all, workers are guaranteed their pay and benefits by someone other than their supervisors.

Supervisors cannot easily control events; rather, they must react to them. It is not surprising, then, that supervisors frequently manifest symptoms of

airlessness: overly close supervision, rules mindedness and a tendency to do the job themselves rather than to train their people (since job skills may be one of the few remaining things they feel good about). Perhaps this is why they sometimes stand as roadblocks between their subordinates and the higher reaches of the company. Staff professionals Also working under conditions that can lead to organizational powerlessness are the staff specialists.

As advisers behind the scenes, staff people must sell their programs and bargain for resources, but unless they get themselves entrenched in organizational power network, they have little in the way Of favors to exchange. They are seen as useful adjuncts to the primary tasks of the organization but inessential in a day to day operating sense. This disenfranchisement occurs particularly when staff jobs consist of easily routine administrative functions which are out of the mainstream of the currently relevant areas and involve little innovative decision making.

Furthermore, in some organizations, unless they have had previous line experience, staff people tend to be limited in the number toots into which they an move, Specialists' leaders are often very short, and professionals are just as likely to get " stuck" in such jobs as people are in less prestigious clerical or factory positions. Staff people, unlike those who are being groomed for important line positions, maybe hired because of a special expertise or particular background. But management rarely pays any attention to developing them into more general organizational resources.

Lacking growth prospects themselves and working alone or in very small teams, they are not in a position to develop others or pass on power to them. They miss out on an important way that power can be accumulated. Staff people tend to act out their powerlessness by becoming turf-minded. They create islands within the organization. They set themselves up as the only who can control professional standards and judge their own work. They create sometimes false distinctions between themselves as experts (no one else could possibly do what they do) and lay people, and this continues to keep them out of the mainstream.

One form such distinctions take is a combination of disdain when line managers attempt to act in areas the professionals think are their preserve and of subtle refusal to support the managers' efforts. Or staff groups battle with each other or control tot new " problem areas", with the result that no one really handles the issue at all, To cope with their essential powerlessness, staff groups may try to evaluate their own status and draw boundaries between themselves and others.

When staff jobs are treated as final resting places for people who have reached their level of competence in the organization a good shelf on which to dump managers who are too old to go anywhere but too young to retire then staff groups can also become pockets of conservatism, resistant to change. Their own exclusion from the risk taking action may make them resist anyone's innovative proposals. In the past, personnel departments, for example, have sometimes been the last in their organization to know about innovations in human resource development or to be interested in applying them.

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Women Managers Experience Special Power Failures The traditional problems foemen in management are illustrative of how formal and informal practices can combine to engender powerlessness. Historically, women in management have found their opportunities in more routine, low- profile jobs. In staff positions, where they serve in support capacities to line managers hut have no line responsibilities of their own, or in supervisory jobs managing “ stuck” subordinates, they are not in a position either to take the kinds of risks that build credibility or to develop their own team by pushing bright subordinates.

Such jobs, which have few favors to trade, tend to keep women out of the mainstream of the organization. This lack of clout, coupled with the greater difficulty anyone who is “ different” has in getting into the information and support networks, has meant that merely by organizational situation women in management have been more likely than men to be rendered structurally powerless. This is one reason those women vivo have achieved power have often ad family connections that put them in the mainstream of the organization’s social circles.

A disproportionate number Of women managers are found among first-line supervisors or staff professionals; and they, like men in those circumstances, are likely to be organizationally powerless. But the behavior Of Other managers can contribute to the powerlessness of women in management in a number of less obvious ways. One way other managers can make a woman powerless in by patronizing overprotecting her: putting her in “ a safe sow’, not giving her enough to do to prove herself, and not suggesting her for high-risk, visible assignments.

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This protectiveness is sometimes born of “ good” intentions to give her every chance to succeed (why stack the deck against her?) Out of managerial concerns, out of awareness that a woman may be up against situations that men simply do not have to face, some very well-meaning managers protect their female managers (“ It’s a jungle, 50 why send her into it? “), Over protectiveness can also mask a manager’s fear of association with a woman should she fail.

One senior bank official at a level below vice president told me about his concern with respect to a high-performing, financially experienced woman reporting to him. Despite his overwhelmingly positive work experiences with her, he was still afraid to recommend her for other assignments because he felt it was a personal risk. ‘ What if other managers are not as accepting of women as I am? ” he asked. “ I know I’d be sticking my neck out; they would take her more because of my endorsement than her qualifications. And what if she doesn’t make it?

My judgment will be on the line. ” Over protectiveness is relatively benign compared With rendering a person powerless by providing obvious sign of lack of managerial support. For example, allowing someone supposedly in authority to be bypassed easily means that no one else has to take him or her seriously. If a woman’s immediate supervisor or other managers listen willingly to criticism of her and show they are concerned every time a negative comment comes up and that they assume she must be at fault, then they are helping to undercut her.

If managers let other people know that they have concern about this person or that they are testing her to see how she does, then they are inviting other people to look for signs of inadequacy or failure. Furthermore, people assume they can afford to bypass women because they “ must be uninformed” or “ don’t know the ropes. “ Even though women may be expected for their competence or expertise, they are not necessarily seen as being informed beyond the technical requirements of the job.

There may be a grain of historical truth in this, Many women come to senior management positions as “ outsiders” rather than up through the usual channels. Also, because until very recently men have not felt comfortable seeing women as business people (business clubs have traditionally excluded women), they have tended to seek each other out for informal socializing. Anyone, male or female, seen as organizationally naive and lacking sources Of “ inside dope” Will find his or ere own lines of information limited.

Finally, even when women are able to achieve some power on their own, they have not necessarily been able to translate such personal credibility into an organizational power base. To create a network of supporters out of individual clout requires that a person passes on and share power, that subordinates and peers be empowered by virtue of their connection with that person. Traditionally, neither men nor women have seen women as capable of sponsoring others, even though they may he capable of achieving and succeeding on their own.

Women have been viewed as the recipients of sponsorship rather than as the sponsors themselves. Viewing managers in terms of power and powerlessness helps explain two familiar stereotypes about women and leadership in organizations: that no one wants a woman boss (although studies show that anyone who has ever had a woman boss is likely to have had a positive experience), and that the reason no one wants a woman boss is that women are "too controlling, rules-minded, and petty. The first stereotype simply makes clear that power is important to leadership. Underneath the preference for men is the assumption that, given the current stratification of people in organizational leadership positions, men are more likely than women to be in positions to achieve power and therefore, to share their power with others. Similarly, the "woman boss" stereotype is a perfect picture of powerlessness.

All of those traits are just as characteristic of men who are powerless, but women are slightly more likely, because of circumstances have mentioned, to find themselves powerless than are men. Women with power in the organization are just as effective and preferred as men. Recent interviews conducted with about 600 bank managers show that, when women exhibits the petty traits of powerlessness, people assume that she does so "because she is a woman".

A striking difference is that, when a man engages in the same behavior, people assume the behavior is a matter of his own individual style and characteristics and do not conclude that it reflects on the suitability of men for management, Top Executives Despite the great resources and

responsibilities concentrated at the top of an organization, leaders can be
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powerless for reasons that are not very different from those that affect staff and supervisors: lack of supplies, information and support.

We have faith in leaders because of their ability to make things happen in the larger world, to create possibilities for everyone else and to attract resources to the organization. These are their supplies. But influence outward the source of much credibility downward can diminish as environments change, setting terms and conditions out of the control of the leaders. Regardless of top management's grand plans for the organization, the environment presses.

At the very least, things going on outside the organization can deflect a leaders attention and drain energy. And more detrimental, decisions made elsewhere can have severe uniqueness for the organization and affect top management's sense of power and thus its operating style inside. As powerlessness in lower levels of organizations can manifest itself in overly routine jobs where performance measures are oriented to rules and absence of change, so it can at upper levels as well. Routine work often drives out non routine work.

Accomplishment becomes a question of nailing down details, Short-term results provide immediate gratifications and Cattish/ stockholders or other constituencies with limited interests, It takes a powerful leader to be willing to risk short-term deprivations in order o bring about desired long-term outcomes. Much as first-line supervisors are tempted to focus on daily adherence to rules, leaders are tempted to focus on short-term fluctuations

and lose sight of long-term objectives. The dynamics of such a situation are self-reinforcing.

The more the long-term goals go unattended, the more a leader feels powerless and the greater the scramble to prove that he or she is in control of daily events at least. The more he is involved in the organization as a short-term Mr. Pix-it, the more out of control of long-term objectives he is, and the more ultimately powerless he is likely to be. Credibility for the top executives often comes from doing the extraordinary: exercising discretion, creating, inventing, planning and acting in non routine ways.

But since routine problems look easier and more manageable, require less change and consent on the part of anyone else, and lend themselves to instant solutions that can make any leader look good temporarily, leaders may avoid the risk by taking over what their subordinates should be doing. Ultimately, a leader may succeed in getting all the trivial problems dumped on his or her desk. This can establish expectations even for leaders attempting more challenging tasks.

When Warren Bennie was president of the university of Cincinnati, a professor called him when the heat was down in a classroom. In writing about this incident, Benny commented, " I suppose he expected me to grab a wrench and fix it". People at the top need to insulate themselves from the routine operations of the organization in order to develop and exercise power. But these very insulations can lead to another source of powerlessness lack of information.

In one multinational corporation, top executives who are sealed off in a large, distant office, flattered and virtually babied by aides, are frustrated by their distance from the real action. At the top, the concern for secrecy and privacy is mixed with real loneliness. In one bank, organization members were so accustomed to never seeing the top leaders that when a new senior vice president went to the branch offices to look around, they had suspicion, even fear, about his intentions.

Thus leaders who are cut out of an organization's information networks understand neither what is really going on at lower levels nor that their isolation may be having negative effects. All too often top executives design "beneficial" new employee programs or declare a new humanitarian policy ("participatory management is now our style") only to find the policy ignored or mistrusted because it is perceived as coming from uncaring bosses.