

Marta Buko

Dr. Susanne Hartl

Organizational Behavior

27 April 2020

Term Project Essay

Power is being able to influence others while authority is being able to use the power you have. In an organization it is important for leaders to have both power and authority over others. It can be used to guide employee behavior and reach organizational goals if utilized properly. However there are many problems that exist with power and authority in organization. In this essay I will discuss three problems that exist with the concept of power and authority in organizations. The first is that power can be abused especially in conditions that are uncertain. Secondly there is a bias against women in positions of power which has an effect on their authority. Third individuals that misuse power often are viewed differently because of their gender.

The article *"The Essential Tension Between Leadership and Power: When Leaders Sacrifice Group Goals for the Sake of Self-Interest"* by Jon K. Maner and Nicole L. Mead explains the delicate relationship that exists between leaders' selfish uses of power and use of power for ethical purposes. To investigate what causes leaders to misuse their power they performed a series of experiments testing different hypotheses. In the first test they selected sixty seven individuals from a university to participate for credit.

The participants completed two tests from the Achievement Motivation Scale and were told that the scores were used to choose who would serve as the leader. Two different condition groups were created; stable and unstable. In both groups the participants were supposed to figure out a word puzzle. Each answer the group came up with correctly would be rewarded. There were also different levels of clues available that were assigned by the leader. The leader could choose if their team members got higher level clues or lower without their subordinates knowing. The differences between the stable and unstable conditions were that in the unstable condition the leaders were told that the roles in the group could change based on performance. A follow up question was asked to evaluate why they assigned the clues they did. It asked if they chose it for power or so the group could get the best reward. The article states the results were that the “participants high in dominance motivation responded to the unstable leadership manipulation by assigning better clues to themselves than to the other participants.” (Maner and Nicole) What this shows is that leaders high in dominance are more likely to use their power in an unethical way if the conditions are not stable. If they feel that they might lose their power they protect themselves over the interest of their subordinates.

In the second experiment a second group of individuals were chosen for another problem solving exercise.. They were also given an evaluation at first and told they would be working in a group to solve a problem. The leaders were made aware that one of the individuals in the group was highly

talented and stood out above the others. They were also told that there were too many people that arrived for the team and they could choose who to exclude. The more problems they got right the bigger the reward. What this study found was similar to the first experiment. The leader in an unstable situation chose to use their power to protect themselves instead of the group. Leaders in the groups did this by excluding the person they knew was talented even though they could have made a positive impact on the groups success and reward.

The change came in the later experiment 3&4 which tested the hypothesis whether power dominant leaders would change how they would respond in unstable situations if their group was competing against another group. A hundred and four people participated in the experiment. The situation was the same as the second experiment except the group was told that they would be competing with another group. Although it was similar circumstances the presence of competition caused a shift in the way the leaders responded. The article states, "Results from Experiment 3 showed that the presence of intergroup competition caused dominance-oriented leaders to perceive a highly skilled group member as especially affiliative and cooperative." (Maner and Nicole) Ultimately what all these experiments showed is what conditions foster an environment where power is used for personal interest vs. social good. It also shows that choosing a leader that is desperate for power and desires to have high dominance can have negative effects on an organization. In the situations that were stable the leader chose

the group success over themselves but in unstable conditions that was the opposite. A solution to the situation that exists is distrusting power. If power is more distributed and not in the hands of a few people individuals are less likely to make corrupt decisions.

A second flaw of power is that to use power one has to have authority. If an individual does not have authority then their power does not mean anything. In the article, "*The Effects of gendered Occupational Roles on Men's and Women's Workplace Authority: Evidence from Microfinance*," by Laura Doering and Sara Thebaud, Thebaud and Doering provide evidence that gender can influence one's authority in the workplace and limit the amount of power they have.

The common findings in these articles is that the way power/authority is used in organization is highly imperfect. The first article showed that under stressful conditions leaders that have a high concern for power will most likely choose personal power over social power. They would rather have the collective group lose if it means that they will have to force themselves to a lower level. The second article showed that subordinates often disregard female authority in roles that are considered male roles. The third article showed that although men and women can both abuse power in the form of narcissistic leadership but the way that the perception others have of men vs women is not the same. The differences in these articles is they focus on specific topics in regard to power and authority. According to all the articles the concept of power/authority is important to leadership because it changes

how effective an organization is. If power was used properly and perceived accurately then organizations could positively change. Likewise it is important to recognize the cause of misuses of power and incorrect perceptions of the topic. In order for something to change the first step is recognizing the problem.

Works Cited

De Hoogh, Annebel H.B., et al. "Gender Differences in the Perceived Effectiveness of Narcissistic Leaders." *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, vol. 64, no. 3, July 2015, pp. 473-498. *Business Source Premier*, EBSCOhost, doi:10.1111/apps.12015. Accessed 30 Apr. 2020.

Doering, Laura, and Sarah Thébaud. "The Effects of Gendered Occupational Roles on Men's and Women's Workplace Authority: Evidence from Microfinance." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 82, no. 3, June 2017, pp. 542-567. *Business Source Premier*, EBSCOhost, doi:10.1177/0003122417703087. Accessed 30 Apr. 2020.

Maner, Jon K., and Nicole L. Mead. "The Essential Tension Between Leadership and Power: When Leaders Sacrifice Group Goals for the Sake of Self-Interest." *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, vol. 99, no. 3, Sept. 2010, pp. 482-497. *Business Source Premier*, EBSCOhost, doi:10.1037/a0018559. Accessed 30 Apr. 2020.