

10.3: The Power to Influence

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the five sources of power.
2. Understand influence tactics.
3. Learn about impression management.
4. Examine the impact of the direction of influence attempts.

Bases of Power

Having power and using power are two different things. For example, imagine a manager who has the power to reward or punish employees. When the manager makes a request, he or she will probably be obeyed even though the manager does not actually reward the employee. The fact that the manager has the ability to give rewards and punishments will be enough for employees to follow the request. What are the sources of one's power over others? Researchers identified six sources of power, which include legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, information, and referent (French & Raven, 1960). You might earn power from one source or all six depending on the situation. Let us take a look at each of these in turn, and continue with Steve Jobs from the opening case as our example.

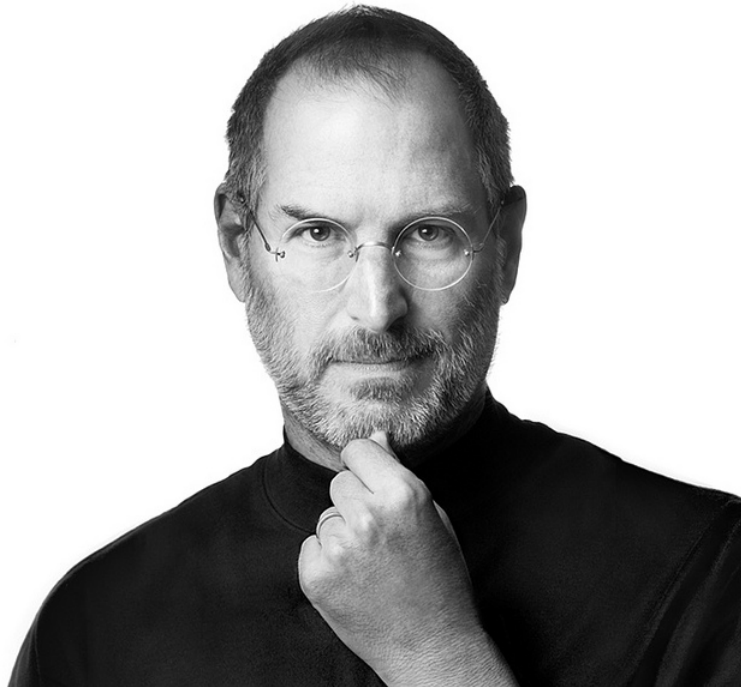


Figure 10.3.5: People who have legitimate power should be aware of how their choices and behaviors affect others. Segagman – Steve Jobs 1955-2011 – CC BY 2.0.

Legitimate Power

Legitimate power is power that comes from one's organizational role or position. For example, a boss can assign projects, a policeman can arrest a citizen, and a teacher assigns grades. Others comply with the requests these individuals make because they accept the legitimacy of the position, whether they like or agree with the request or not. Steve Jobs has enjoyed legitimate power as the CEO of Apple. He could set deadlines and employees comply even if they think the deadlines were overly ambitious. Start-up organizations often have founders who use their legitimate power to influence individuals to work long hours week after week in order to help the company survive.

Reward Power

Reward power is the ability to grant a reward, such as an increase in pay, a perk, or an attractive job assignment. Reward power tends to accompany legitimate power and is highest when the reward is scarce. Anyone can wield reward power, however, in the

form of public praise or giving someone something in exchange for their compliance. When Steve Jobs ran Apple, he had reward power in the form of raises and promotions. Another example of reward power comes from Bill Gross, founder of Idealab, who has the power to launch new companies or not. He created his company with the idea of launching other new companies as soon as they could develop viable ideas. If members could convince him that their ideas were viable, he gave the company a maximum of \$250,000 in seed money, and gave the management team and employees a 30% stake in the company and the CEO 10% of the company. That way, everyone had a stake in the company. The CEO's salary was capped at \$75,000 to maintain the sense of equity. When one of the companies, Citysearch, went public, all employees benefited from the \$270 million valuation.

Coercive Power

In contrast, **coercive power** is the ability to take something away or punish someone for noncompliance. Coercive power often works through fear, and it forces people to do something that ordinarily they would not choose to do. The most extreme example of coercion is government dictators who threaten physical harm for noncompliance. Parents may also use coercion such as grounding their child as punishment for noncompliance. Steve Jobs has been known to use coercion—yelling at employees and threatening to fire them. When John Wiley & Sons Inc. published an unauthorized biography of Jobs, Jobs's response was to prohibit sales of all books from that publisher in any Apple retail store (Hafner, 2005). In other examples, John D. Rockefeller was ruthless when running Standard Oil Company. He not only undercut his competitors through pricing, but he used his coercive power to get railroads to refuse to transport his competitor's products. American presidents have been known to use coercion power. President Lyndon Baines Johnson once told a White House staffer, "Just you remember this. There's only two kinds at the White house. There's elephants and there's ants. And I'm the only elephant" (Hughes, Ginnet, & Curphy, 1995).

Expert Power

Expert power comes from knowledge and skill. Steve Jobs has expert power from his ability to know what customers want—even before they can articulate it. Others who have expert power in an organization include long-time employees, such as a steelworker who knows the temperature combinations and length of time to get the best yields. Technology companies are often characterized by expert, rather than legitimate power. Many of these firms utilize a flat or matrix structure in which clear lines of legitimate power become blurred as everyone communicates with everyone else regardless of position.

Information Power

Information power is similar to expert power but differs in its source. Experts tend to have a vast amount of knowledge or skill, whereas information power is distinguished by *access* to specific information. For example, knowing price information gives a person information power during negotiations. Within organizations, a person's social network can either isolate them from information power or serve to create it. As we will see later in this chapter, those who are able to span boundaries and serve to connect different parts of the organizations often have a great deal of information power. In the TV show *Mad Men*, which is set in the 1960s, it is clear that the switchboard operators have a great deal of information power as they place all calls and are able to listen in on all the phone conversations within the advertising firm.

Referent Power



Figure 10.3.6: As the 44th elected president of the United States, Barack Obama has legitimate power. As commander-in-chief of the U.S. Armed Forces, he also has coercive power. His ability to appoint individuals to cabinet positions affords him reward power. Individuals differ on the degree to which they feel he has expert and referent power, as he received 52% of the popular vote in the 2008 election. Shortly after the election, he began to be briefed on national security issues, providing him with substantial information power as well. Wikimedia Commons – CC BY 2.0.

Referent power stems from the personal characteristics of the person such as the degree to which we like, respect, and want to be like them. Referent power is often called **charisma**—the ability to attract others, win their admiration, and hold them spellbound. Steve Jobs’s influence as described in the opening case is an example of this charisma.

What Is Influence?

Starting at infancy, we all try to get others to do what we want. We learn early what works in getting us to our goals. Instead of crying and throwing a tantrum, we may figure out that smiling and using language causes everyone less stress and brings us the rewards we seek.

By the time you hit the workplace, you have had vast experience with influence techniques. You have probably picked out a few that you use most often. To be effective in a wide number of situations, however, it’s best to expand your repertoire of skills and become competent in several techniques, knowing how and when to use them as well as understanding when they are being used on you. If you watch someone who is good at influencing others, you will most probably observe that person switching tactics depending on the context. The more tactics you have at your disposal, the more likely it is that you will achieve your influence goals.

Al Gore and many others have spent years trying to influence us to think about the changes in the environment and the implications of global warming. They speak, write, network, and lobby to get others to pay attention. But Gore, for example, does not stop there. He also works to persuade us with direct, action-based suggestions such as asking everyone to switch the kind of light bulbs they use, turn off appliances when not in use, drive vehicles with better fuel economy, and even take shorter showers. Ironically, Gore has more influence now as a private citizen regarding these issues than he was able to exert as a congressman, senator, and vice president of the United States.

OB Toolbox: Self-Assessment

Do You Have the Characteristics of Powerful Influencers?

People who are considered to be skilled influencers share the following attributes.

How often do you engage in them? 0 = never, 1= sometimes, 2 = always.

- present information that can be checked for accuracy
- provide a consistent message that does not change from situation to situation
- display authority and enthusiasm (often described as charisma)
- offer something in return for compliance
- act likable
- show empathy through listening
- show you are aware of circumstances, others, and yourself
- plan ahead

If you scored 0–6: You do not engage in much effective influencing behavior. Think of ways to enhance this skill. A great place to start is to recognize the items on the list above and think about ways to enhance them for yourself.

If you scored 7–12: You engage in some influencing behavior. Consider the context of each of these influence attempts to see if you should be using more or less of it depending on your overall goals.

If you scored 13–16: You have a great deal of influence potential. Be careful that you are not manipulating others and that you are using your influence when it is important rather than just to get your own way.

Commonly Used Influence Tactics

Figure 13.7 Influence Tactics Use and Outcomes (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990; Yukl & Falbe, 1991).

	Frequency of Use	Resistance	Compliance	Commitment
Rational persuasion	54%	47%	30%	23%
Legitimizing	13%	44%	56%	0%

Personal appeals	7%	25%	33%	42%
Exchange	7%	25%	33%	42%
Ingratiation	6%	41%	28%	31%
Pressure	6%	56%	41%	3%
Coalitions	3%	53%	44%	3%
Inspirational appeals	2%	0%	10%	90%
Consultation	2%	18%	27%	55%

Source: Adapted from information in Falbe, C. M., & Yukl, G. (1992). Consequences for managers of using single influence tactics and combinations of tactics. *Academy of Management Journal*, 35, 638–652.

Researchers have identified distinct influence tactics and discovered that there are few differences between the way bosses, subordinates, and peers use them, which we will discuss at greater depth later on in this chapter. We will focus on nine influence tactics. Responses to influence attempts include resistance, compliance, or commitment. **Resistance** occurs when the influence target does not wish to comply with the request and either passively or actively repels the influence attempt. **Compliance** occurs when the target does not necessarily want to obey, but they do. **Commitment** occurs when the target not only agrees to the request but also actively supports it as well. Within organizations, commitment helps to get things done, because others can help to keep initiatives alive long after compliant changes have been made or resistance has been overcome.

1. **Rational persuasion** includes using facts, data, and logical arguments to try to convince others that your point of view is the best alternative. This is the most commonly applied influence tactic. One experiment illustrates the power of reason. People were lined up at a copy machine and another person, after joining the line asked, “May I go to the head of the line?” Amazingly, 63% of the people in the line agreed to let the requester jump ahead. When the line jumper makes a slight change in the request by asking, “May I go to the head of the line because I have copies to make?” the number of people who agreed jumped to over 90%. The word *because* was the only difference. Effective rational persuasion includes the presentation of factual information that is clear and specific, relevant, and timely. Across studies summarized in a meta-analysis, rationality was related to positive work outcomes (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003).
2. **Inspirational appeals** seek to tap into our values, emotions, and beliefs to gain support for a request or course of action. When President John F. Kennedy said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country,” he appealed to the higher selves of an entire nation. Effective inspirational appeals are authentic, personal, big-thinking, and enthusiastic.
3. **Consultation** refers to the influence agent’s asking others for help in directly influencing or planning to influence another person or group. Consultation is most effective in organizations and cultures that value democratic decision making.
4. **Ingratiation** refers to different forms of making others feel good about themselves. Ingratiation includes any form of flattery done either before or during the influence attempt. Research shows that ingratiation can affect individuals. For example, in a study of résumés, those résumés that were accompanied with a cover letter containing ingratiating information were rated higher than résumés without this information. Other than the cover letter accompanying them, the résumés were identical (Varma, Toh, & Pichler, 2006). Effective ingratiation is honest, infrequent, and well intended.
5. **Personal appeal** refers to helping another person because you like them and they asked for your help. We enjoy saying yes to people we know and like. A famous psychological experiment showed that in dorms, the most well-liked people were those who lived by the stairwell—they were the most often seen by others who entered and left the hallway. The repeated contact brought a level of familiarity and comfort. Therefore, personal appeals are most effective with people who know and like you.
6. **Exchange** refers to give-and-take in which someone does something for you, and you do something for them in return. The rule of reciprocity says that “we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us” (Cialdini, 2000). The application of the rule obliges us and makes us indebted to the giver. One experiment illustrates how a small initial gift can open people to a substantially larger request at a later time. One group of subjects was given a bottle of Coke. Later, all subjects were asked to buy raffle tickets. On the average, people who had been given the drink bought twice as many raffle tickets as those who had not been given the unsolicited drinks.
7. **Coalition tactics** refer to a group of individuals working together toward a common goal to influence others. Common examples of coalitions within organizations are unions that may threaten to strike if their demands are not met. Coalitions also take

advantage of peer pressure. The influencer tries to build a case by bringing in the unseen as allies to convince someone to think, feel, or do something. A well-known psychology experiment draws upon this tactic. The experimenters stare at the top of a building in the middle of a busy street. Within moments, people who were walking by in a hurry stop and also look at the top of the building, trying to figure out what the others are looking at. When the experimenters leave, the pattern continues, often for hours. This tactic is also extremely popular among advertisers and businesses that use client lists to promote their goods and services. The fact that a client bought from the company is a silent testimonial.

8. **Pressure** refers to exerting undue influence on someone to do what you want or else something undesirable will occur. This often includes threats and frequent interactions until the target agrees. Research shows that managers with low referent power tend to use pressure tactics more frequently than those with higher referent power (Yukl, Kim, & Falbe, 1996). Pressure tactics are most effective when used in a crisis situation and when they come from someone who has the other's best interests in mind, such as getting an employee to an employee assistance program to deal with a substance abuse problem.
9. **Legitimizing tactics** occur when the appeal is based on legitimate or position power. "By the power vested in me...": This tactic relies upon compliance with rules, laws, and regulations. It is not intended to motivate people but to align them behind a direction. Obedience to authority is filled with both positive and negative images. Position, title, knowledge, experience, and demeanor grant authority, and it is easy to see how it can be abused. If someone hides behind people's rightful authority to assert themselves, it can seem heavy-handed and without choice. You must come across as an authority figure by the way you act, speak, and look. Think about the number of commercials with doctors, lawyers, and other professionals who look and sound the part, even if they are actors. People want to be convinced that the person is an authority worth heeding. Authority is often used as a last resort. If it does not work, you will not have much else to draw from in your goal to persuade someone.

From the Best-Seller's List: Making OB Connections

You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.

Dale Carnegie

How to Make Friends and Influence People was written by Dale Carnegie in 1936 and has sold millions of copies worldwide. While this book first appeared over 70 years ago, the recommendations still make a great deal of sense regarding power and influence in modern-day organizations. For example, he recommends that in order to get others to like you, you should remember six things:

1. Become genuinely interested in other people.
2. Smile.
3. Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.
4. Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.
5. Talk in terms of the other person's interests.
6. Make the other person feel important—and do it sincerely.

This book relates to power and politics in a number of important ways. Carnegie specifically deals with enhancing referent power. Referent power grows if others like, respect, and admire you. Referent power is more effective than formal power bases and is positively related to employees' satisfaction with supervision, organizational commitment, and performance. One of the keys to these recommendations is to engage in them in a genuine manner. This can be the difference between being seen as political versus understanding politics.

Impression Management

Impression management means actively shaping the way you are perceived by others. You can do this through your choice of clothing, the avatars or photos you use to represent yourself online, the descriptions of yourself on a résumé or in an online profile, and so forth. By using impression management strategies, you control information that make others see you in the way you want to be seen. Consider when you are "being yourself" with your friends or with your family—you probably act differently around your best friend than around your mother (Dunn & Forrin, 2005).

On the job, the most effective approach to impression management is to do two things at once—build credibility and maintain authenticity. As Harvard Business School Professor Laura Morgan Roberts puts it, "When you present yourself in a manner that is both true to self and valued and believed by others, impression management can yield a host of favorable outcomes for you, your team, and your organization" (Stark, 2005).

There may be aspects of your “true self” that you choose not to disclose at work, although you would disclose them to your close friends. That kind of impression management may help to achieve group cohesiveness and meet professional expectations. But if you try to win social approval at work by being too different from your true self—contradicting your personal values—you might feel psychological distress.

It’s important to keep in mind that whether you’re actively managing your professional image or not, your coworkers are forming impressions of you. They watch your behavior and draw conclusions about the kind of person you are, whether you’ll keep your word, whether you’ll stay to finish a task, and how you’ll react in a difficult situation.

Since people are forming these theories about you no matter what, you should take charge of managing their impressions of you. To do this, ask yourself how you want to be seen. What qualities or character traits do you want to convey? Perhaps it’s a can-do attitude, an ability to mediate, an ability to make a decision, or an ability to dig into details to thoroughly understand and solve a problem.

Then, ask yourself what the professional expectations are of you and what aspects of your social identity you want to emphasize or minimize in your interactions with others. If you want to be seen as a leader, you might disclose how you organized an event. If you want to be seen as a caring person in whom people can confide, you might disclose that you’re a volunteer on a crisis helpline. You can use a variety of impression management strategies to accomplish the outcomes you want.

Here are the three main categories of strategies and examples of each:

- **Nonverbal impression management** includes the clothes you choose to wear and your demeanor. An example of a nonverbal signal is body art, including piercings and tattoos. While the number of people in the United States who have body art has risen from 1% in 1976 to 24% in 2006, it can hold you back at work. Vault.com did a survey and found that 58% of the managers they surveyed said they would be less likely to hire someone with visible body art, and over 75% of respondents felt body art was unprofessional. Given these numbers, it should not be surprising that 67% of employees say they conceal body art while they are at work (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology Inc., 2008).
- **Verbal impression management** includes your tone of voice, rate of speech, what you choose to say and how you say it. We know that 38% of the comprehension of verbal communication comes from these cues. Managing how you project yourself in this way can alter the impression that others have of you. For example, if your voice has a high pitch and it is shaky, others may assume that you are nervous or unsure of yourself.
- **Behavior impression management** includes how you perform on the job and how you interact with others. Complimenting your boss is an example of a behavior that would indicate impression management. Other impression management behaviors include conforming, making excuses, apologizing, promoting your skills, doing favors, and making desirable associations known. Impression management has been shown to be related to higher performance ratings by increasing liking, perceived similarity, and network centrality (Barsness, Diekmann, & Seidel, 2005; Wayne & Liden, 1995).



Figure 10.3.9: Impression management includes how a person dresses, how they stand, and the way they behave at work. Andrew Pearson – Professional – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Research shows that impression management occurs throughout the workplace. It is especially salient when it comes to job interviews and promotional contexts. Research shows that structured interviews suffer from less impression management bias than

unstructured interviews, and that longer interviews lead to a lessening of the effects as well (Tsai, Chen, & Chiu, 2005).

Direction of Influence

The type of influence tactic used tends to vary based on the target. For example, you would probably use different influence tactics with your boss than you would with a peer or with employees working under you.

Upward Influence

Upward influence, as its name implies, is the ability to influence your boss and others in positions higher than yours. Upward influence may include appealing to a higher authority or citing the firm's goals as an overarching reason for others to follow your cause. Upward influence can also take the form of an alliance with a higher status person (or with the perception that there is such an alliance) (Farmer & Maslyn, 1999; Farmer et al., 1997). As complexity grows, the need for this upward influence grows as well—the ability of one person at the top to know enough to make all the decisions becomes less likely. Moreover, even if someone did know enough, the sheer ability to make all the needed decisions fast enough is no longer possible. This limitation means that individuals at all levels of the organization need to be able to make and influence decisions. By helping higher-ups be more effective, employees can gain more power for themselves and their unit as well. On the flip side, allowing yourself to be influenced by those reporting to you may build your credibility and power as a leader who listens. Then, during a time when you do need to take unilateral, decisive action, others will be more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt and follow. Both Asian American and Caucasian American managers report using different tactics with superiors than those used with their subordinates (Xin & Tsui, 1996). Managers reported using coalitions and rationality with managers and assertiveness with subordinates. Other research establishes that subordinates' use of rationality, assertiveness, and reciprocal exchange was related to more favorable outcomes such as promotions and raises, while self-promotion led to more negative outcomes (Orpen, 1996; Wayne et al., 1997).

Influence takes place even before employees are hired. For example, ingratiation and rationality were used frequently by fire fighters during interviews (McFarland, Ryan, & Kriska, 2002). Extraverts tend to engage in a greater use of self-promotion tactics while interviewing, and research shows that extraverts are more likely to use inspirational appeal and ingratiation as influence tactics (Cable & Judge, 2003; Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002). Research shows that ingratiation was positively related to perceived fit with the organization and recruiters' hiring recommendations (Higgins & Judge, 2004).

Downward Influence

Downward influence is the ability to influence employees lower than you. This is best achieved through an inspiring vision. By articulating a clear vision, you help people see the end goal and move toward it. You often don't need to specify exactly what needs to be done to get there—people will be able to figure it out on their own. An inspiring vision builds buy-in and gets people moving in the same direction. Research conducted within large savings banks shows that managers can learn to be more effective at influence attempts. The experimental group of managers received a feedback report and went through a workshop to help them become more effective in their influence attempts. The control group of managers received no feedback on their prior influence attempts. When subordinates were asked 3 months later to evaluate potential changes in their managers' behavior, the experimental group had much higher ratings of the appropriate use of influence (Seifer, Yukl, & McDonald, 2003). Research also shows that the better the quality of the relationship between the subordinate and their supervisor, the more positively resistance to influence attempts are seen (Tepper et al., 2006). In other words, bosses who like their employees are less likely to interpret resistance as a problem.

Peer Influence

Peer influence occurs all the time. But, to be effective within organizations, peers need to be willing to influence each other without being destructively competitive (Cohen & Bradford, 2002). There are times to support each other and times to challenge—the end goal is to create better decisions and results for the organization and to hold each other accountable. Executives spend a great deal of their time working to influence other executives to support their initiatives. Research shows that across all functional groups of executives, finance or human resources as an example, rational persuasion is the most frequently used influence tactic (Enns & McFarlin, 2003).

OB Toolbox: Getting Comfortable With Power

Now that you've learned a great deal about power and influence within organizations, consider asking yourself how comfortable you are with the three statements below:

- Are you comfortable saying, "I want to be powerful" to yourself? Why or why not?
- Are you comfortable saying, "I want to be powerful" to someone else? Why or why not?
- Are you comfortable having someone say, "You are powerful" to you? Why or why not?

Discomfort with power reduces your power. Experts know that leaders need to feel comfortable with power. Those who feel uncomfortable with power send those signals out unconsciously. If you feel uncomfortable with power, consider putting the statement in a shared positive light by saying, "I want to be powerful so that we can accomplish this goal."

Key Takeaways

Individuals have six potential sources of power, including legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, information, and referent power. Influence tactics are the way that individuals attempt to influence one another in organizations. Rational persuasion is the most frequently used influence tactic, although it is frequently met with resistance. Inspirational appeals result in commitment 90% of the time, but the tactic is utilized only 2% of the time. The other tactics include legitimizing, personal appeals, exchanges, ingratiation, pressure, forming coalitions, and consultation. Impression management behaviors include conforming, making excuses, apologizing, promoting your skills, doing favors, and making associations with desirable others known. Influence attempts may be upward, downward, or lateral in nature.

Exercises

1. Which of the six bases of power do you usually draw upon? Which do you use the least of at this time?
2. Distinguish between coercive and reward power.
3. Which tactics seem to be the most effective? Explain your answer.
4. Why do you think rational persuasion is the most frequently utilized influence tactic?
5. Give an example of someone you've tried to influence lately. Was it an upward, downward, or lateral influence attempt?

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