Chapter 6.   Personal Power and Influence in Organization Development

Introduction

During most of the seventies I was deeply involved in a project which I undertook with David Berlew to develop, refine and deliver a training product, *The Positive Power & Influence Program.* During that time, my capacity for writing was almost entirely absorbed by that program and its successors, *The Positive Negotiation Program,* and a program for training people in "long cycle selling." I was frustrated that we were learning so much about personal power and influence, and that none of it was available outside of our proprietary programs. I wrote this short piece, together with my colleague and fellow "power trainer," Jim Kouzes, late in the period of my involvement with *The Positive Power & Influence Program.* It was intended to be a handout in a version of that program which I was developing for use with consultants, and I also created a "Consulting Styles Questionnaire" and a set of exercises to go along with it.

I gave the workshop once or twice, but I knew by that time that running a training business was diverting me from my true path of service. I was beginning to move on to other things, and I did not publish the program. We published the paper in the American Society of Training and Development's journal, *Training News,* and it now stands as the sole public monument to a decade of my life. The energy model presented in the paper derives from work by Karen Horney, a psychoanalyst. I must have read the work years before, in graduate school, but I remembered nothing of it until I attended a national conference of the Association for Humanistic Psychology at

Princeton, in 1977 or 1978. There, a man named Robert Semple conducted an experiential session on how we use energy in relating to others, and I was thrilled with his model, instantly seeing how I could use it to improve on the one my colleagues and I were then using in our workshops. It was the first time I used the metaphor of *energy* to help myself and others understand interpersonal processes, and it has been an increasingly useful and central theme in my thought and work ever since. As we leave the Age of Matter, in which our preoccupations were largely with the physical world, and work more and more with mental and even spiritual powers, our mental models need to shift accordingly. The model presented in this short piece is appropriate to our new ways of thinking and perceiving as we enter the Age of Energy (or the Age of Information , which I see as *encoded energy*).

Personal Power and Influence in Organization Development

We live in a world in which many people are chronically confused and upset about issues of power and influence. In more settled times, the stable structures of organizations and social institutions provided reliable road maps to how to get what we wanted in the world. Sometimes the road maps showed that we couldn't get where we wanted to go from where we started, if we lacked advantages of birth, education and connections, but at least we knew where we stood. More recently, the rapid pace of social, political and technological changes has blocked some paths to our heart's desire and opened others up, and the map changes with bewildering rapidity. In the city where I live, Berkeley, California, a place of exquisite cultural fluidity, it is said that "everything is possible, but nothing is especially likely." I think this aphorism

epitomizes a society in which people become very preoccupied with power and influence, the art of getting what we need and want from other people. Certainly this preoccupation is both recent and pervasive.

When I left the United States in 1968 to live and work in Europe, books full of hope and peace like The Greening of America were spinning messages of love to optimistic Americans. When I returned in 1976, the airport newsstands offered "Power: How to Get It and How to Keep It," "Winning Through Intimidation," and "Looking Out for Number One." Clearly, something had changed in our culture, rapidly and radically. Professionally that change suited me well enough, for I was engaged in attempting to interest clients in the Positive Power and Influence Program which David Berlew and I had recently developed and the signs pointed to a ready market for our efforts. Personally I was saddened, and I wished for the good old days of hope and love.

Those ambivalent feelings persist, and as I have watched both consultants and managers go through our programs, I frequently see in other OD practitioners a similar tension between a professional interest in power, and a personal longing for a gentler world. I have come to suspect that like others, I create for my clients those educational experiences that I need myself for working through my conflicts and uncertainties. I have spent an enormous amount of time during the past six or seven years in helping all kinds of people to use their personal power more effectively, and in the process I have learned lots of fascinating things about myself and about face to face influence processes. The doubts and questions persist, however, and what I

should like to share with colleagues is more a framework for considering the professional and personal issues around power and influence that arise for OD practitioners than a set of conclusions. Let me say at the outset that I believe part of the problem to be the tendency many of us have to limit our implicit understanding of the meaning of the word "power" in a way that makes the concept negative, causes us to experience guilt and discomfort over our own power needs and motives, and weakens us in dealing with strong clients and tough organizational issues.

Personal versus Positional Power

We are taught to associate power with authority and position. According to the balance of our dependent and counterdependent tendencies, we are impressed or offended by the authority that attaches to high political and organizational office. Like most others, we may personalize the office, attributing the system power that is located there to the incumbents, ignoring the checks and balances that may reduce their personal impact on the flow of events to a small fraction of what it appears to be.

These days, I think that more and more people are learning to differentiate this positional power from personal power, if for no other reason than that so often positional power is insufficient to get things done in organizations and in society. Increasingly, people at all levels in organizations are having to rely upon their own skills of persuasion, negotiation, personal charisma and trust building in order to get things done that used to yield to a word from the right source. Partly this is because we are working more with matrix systems and other organization forms that are not

strictly hierarchical. Partly it seems due to the proliferation of multiple power centers in organizations and in society at large. For example:

· project and program managers must get support and cooperation from individuals and groups over whom they have some influence but no authority.

· many more people are in staff roles where they must influence organizational policies and procedures through persuading and negotiating with line managers who carry the authority for implementation.

· groups and categories of employees such as women, minorities, union members, and youth increasingly question the good faith and the legitimacy of "legitimate" authority and have the legal or collective means to resist effectively.

Of course, as consultants we have always relied on our personal influencing skills to get things done, rather than on our mostly nonexistent positional power. Most of us have developed considerable skill in doing this, and it ought to make us feel powerful. But with notable exceptions, we do not seem as a profession to consider ourselves to be terribly potent. We seem instead to define "power" as what our more prestigious clients have, and to exclude our own interpersonal skills from that definition. We differentiate personal and positional power so sharply that we lose sight of their mutual participation in the definition of social power: "the ability of some person or group to influence or control some aspect of another person or group" (Cartwright, 1959).

This is more than just a semantic distinction It limits our experience of our own potency, and it weakens us in dealing with those who possess whatever it is we do accept as the signs and trappings of power. I believe this to be part of a process by which we deny our own power and magnify that of others.

Positive and Negative Power

We are a profession characterized by an emphasis on cooperation, caring, and the introduction of broadly humanistic values into the workplace. Most oD us tend to be nice people personally. We are prone to deplore strife, bickering, and the selfish, destructive and dehumanizing uses of political and organizational power that we see so frequently in client systems. Sometimes we come to see power as our enemy.

We are often a little envious, however. We usually occupy positions that are writ small on the informal "power maps" of our organizations, and we find ourselves dealing with clients whose understanding of power and ability to manipulate it are greater than ours. Their respect is sometimes reserved for those who are strong and assertive, or politically astute. We do not allow ourselves to wish to dominate or bully others, but we have good ideas and worthwhile goals that we want to achieve. Often it does seem that nice guys like us finish last, even when our professional game is not overtly competitive. We define "power" as not quite nice, but we are still attracted by it. Somehow our power fantasies acquire the same guilty attractions that erotic ones did before we became so liberated in the sixties.

I should like to invite you to explore for yourself some of your own ideas and values about personal power. Consider the following situations that an OD

practitioner might run into. Ask yourself how you would go about trying to achieve your objectives in the situation, and how the other person might react to your approach.

- You have spent a lot of time working out the details of a project with a client, and she has agreed to go ahead. Now she informs you that she has asked another consultant to bid on the project, and has received a significantly lower bid. She has asked you if you want to do the job at the lower figure You need the work, but you feel your figure is a fair one.

- Your client engaged you to conduct staff training, making it clear he expected to participate as co-trainer. After the first such experience, you have concluded that his heavy-handed and insensitive style seriously blocks the learning of the participants. Tactful attempts on your part to discuss the problem have been brushed aside. You feel you cannot be professionally responsible for the work if he participates.

- You have submitted your final report on a diagnostic study for a public agency, and you are to attend a meeting at which the report will be explained and discussed with those responsible for further funding. When you pick up your copy of the report at the meeting, you discover that without informing you, the agency head has deleted all the parts of your report that were in any way critical of the operation.

- Your colleague tends to become irritable and defensive when criticized in any way. Recently he performed badly in an important presentation of

your joint project. Another presentation is coming up, and he expects to take the lead as before. You believe you could do a much better job as presenter.

- Your client is an authoritarian manager with high needs for control. She keeps pressing you to reveal details of your conversations with subordinates. So far you have avoided a direct confrontation over this, but you feel it is time to get the matter straightened out.

- Your colleague on a project is enthusiastic and optimistic in selling services to the client, but lets you do most of the work behind the scenes. When you mention this, he is contrite, and promises to do better, and praises the good job you have done covering for him. You are fed up with doing most of the work, and you want to get an agreement that will stick.

These situations are what George Peabody calls "power moments." They are critical points at which one's choice of an immediate response makes the difference between winning and losing, becoming weaker or stronger, succeeding or failing in one's purposes. These situations were chosen because they fit our stereotypes about power: there is some conflict of interest that must be resolved; there is considerable potential for conflict; one or both parties is likely to experience loss or defeat as a result; and a favorable economic or organizational position may give one party an advantage over the other.

In our programs on power and influence, we find these kinds of situations create conflicts for many consultants and professional helpers. They have learned to

value building trust and cooperation through being supportive and constructive. Conflict situations seem to offer only negative choices: being authoritarian, aggressive or manipulative; or failing to achieve our goals.

Let us contrast the foregoing situations with some others. Once again, ask yourself how you would handle the situation, and how the other person(s) might react.

· You are behind on an important project report. This has happened before, and your client is angry and upset. Although you cannot produce the report when she wants it, you want to maintain the relationship, and keep the client. – You are conducting a training exercise when one of the participants becomes very critical of your conduct of the meeting, and abusive of your profession. You want to get that person "on board" and get on with the work.

· In discussing a project with a potential client, you have difficulty getting him to open up about his situation and needs. He keeps the conversation on *your* background, experience and qualifications. While you are happy to answer these questions, you need more information from him if you are to come up with a pertinent proposal.

· Although your client has been an enthusiastic supporter of your work, manpower and budgetary problems are influencing her to cut back on the project just at the point where you feel a real payoff is imminent. You want to get her to commit the resources that are needed for the project to reach "critical mass" and become self sustaining.

- You are working with two co-leaders to plan a workshop. The others show scant respect for one another's ideas, and their disagreements are seriously interfering with the work. You want to get them to submerge their differences in the common task of creating a worthwhile and exciting learning experience for the participants. When you presented the results of your diagnostic study to a client group, they became discouraged and defensive about the many problems revealed by your survey. You want them to see the positive opportunities that this survey opens up to create a better working environment and a more effective organization.

These situation, too, are "power moments," in which our influencing skills make the difference between succeeding and failing in our purposes. For most consultants, they are considerably less threatening than the first set. They seem to call for the skills we possess: active listening, trust building, generating enthusiasm. Equally important, they are situations in which a win-win outcome is easy to imagine, if not always to achieve. We can be comfortable exercising our personal power and take guilt-free satisfaction in succeeding in our aims.

We find in our workshops on power and influence that even when consultants possess formidable skills for dealing with situations like these, they often do not think of themselves as powerful people. Neither do they see the delight they take in their successful outcomes as "being into power." They seem to have a need to split or dissociate their helping skills from their idea of "power." When they do include the helping abilities as part of the spectrum of power skills, there remains a strong

tendency to see these softer skills as positive, and the pushing, confronting and negotiating skills as not very nice.

A Model of Personal Power and Influence

A useful way to look at the influence process is to consider how people use *psychological energy* with each other. When a person tries to change or affect another, something analogous to physical energy or force is involved. It takes energy to overcome the inertia of the other person and to produce movement or change. We can identify four *energy modes* in interpersonal relationships on which to base a model of influencing behaviors, and we can identify a consultant power style that is associated with each. The reader may want to rank the four energy modes according to the frequency with which s/he uses each in his or her professional practice.

- *Pushing*: when we are *Pushing* we direct our energy toward others in order to get them to change in some way: to start or stop doing something, to believe or think in some new way, to adopt different attitudes, to perform according to certain standards, and so on. When we are *Pushing* we are attempting to move, induce, teach, or control the other person by the direct application of s*uggestions, orders, information, criticism, arguments, pressures, threats,* and so on.

  The consultant power style that is most closely associated with *Pushing* is that of the *Expert*. In this style the consultant diagnoses, prescribes and directs the client in an authoritative manner.

- *Attracting*: when we are *Attracting*, we behave so that others are drawn to join or follow us. The others experience ourselves, our ideas or our energy as attractive, magnetic, or exciting. They are moved to join forces with us in our projects, go along with our ideas, and share our visions and ideals. We attract by *showing enthusiasm*, by *sharing dreams and ideals,* by appealing to *common values,* and by using colorful language to evoke *exciting possibilities.*

  The consultant power style associated with *Attracting* is that of the *Visionary.* In this style the consultant inspires and energizes clients with hopes of a better world, and creates a sense of common purpose by appeal to deeply held values and ideals. David Berlew was, I think, the first to identify this as a management style (Berlew, 1974).

- *Joining*: when we *Join*, we add our energy to that of others so as to increase or augment it. We join with others by *encouraging,* by expressing *empathy and understanding,* by *summarizing and reflecting* their ideas and feelings, and by expressing our willingness to *cooperate and reach agreement.* When criticized or attacked by others, a *Joining* response is to *accept criticism,* and to *admit our deficiencies and mistakes.* When used actively, *Joining* influences the other by selectively augmenting tendencies and directions of the other, thus shaping behavior without pushing.

  The consultant power style associated with *Joining* is that of the Facilitator. The consultant builds an atmosphere of trust, support and personal

acceptance in which clients feel free to be themselves and to take personal risks with their ideas and feelings.

- *Disengaging*: when we *Disengage*, we avoid or deflect others' energy. We diffuse or absorb energy and thus diminish its impact. We *Disengage* by *withdrawing or failing to respond*, by *changing the subject,* and by *using humor* to lighten the atmosphere. We *postpone or refer* matters rather than dealing with them, and we *depersonalize conflicts* by reference to rules and regulations. In this way we avoid negative involvement and conserve energy.

  The consultant power style associated with *Disengaging* is that of the *System Worker*. In this style the consultant keeps a low profile and works within the system. S/he avoids confrontation and controversy by changes of direction and adroit timing, and strives to maintain an image of legitimacy for his or her activities.

In training OD consultants, a great deal of attention is given to the development of *Joining* skills, and for many consultants and clients the image of the consultant's role is quite close to that of the *Facilitator*. In fact, the more successful among us usually possess and use substantial *Attracting* skills as well, particularly those external consultants who command very high daily fees!   And many successful internal consultants are adept at the use of *Disengaging* in dealing with threatening uses of positional power by their detractors within the organization.

In spite of these actualities, the mystique and folklore of OD centers on *Joining* as *the* valued cluster of influence behaviors, and on the *Facilitator* as the modal consultant power style. As a profession we attract relatively soft people in the first place, and the training we give further sharpens their soft power skills. We discourage the more active and forceful skills, such as *Pushing*, and our literature and training tends to ignore *Attracting* altogether.

To summarize this diagnosis: we members of the helping professions tend to think of "power" as referring to the exercise of skills of direction and control, negotiation and bargaining, and political manipulation. We tend to associate the possession of this power with positional authority in organizations. We tend not to think of ourselves as powerful people, and we do not include skills of facilitation and consultation in our definition of power. We tend to regard those influencing skills that we associate with our idea of "power' as inherently negative, and to value positively our own helping skills. At the same time, many of us are becoming fascinated with power. We are alternately attracted by what we imagine we could achieve if we had it, and repelled by the corruption and exploitation that we associate with its irresponsible use. Although this diagnosis does not of course apply to all of us, I believe it is sufficiently pervasive to create some consequences for our profession. We find it hard to deal with the power of position, politics and economic pressure in a way that commands the respect of those who feel at home with these currencies. We may thereby lose our access to the spectrum of "harder" power moments that have such important consequences for the organizations and individuals we serve.

We over-rely on our facilitating skills, and when we find ourselves in high pressure, conflict-laden situations, we use our soft skills in manipulative and devious ways. Because we see our facilitative approach as essentially positive, we tend to be insensitive to the negative consequences we may create.

When we occasionally find ourselves cornered and finally resort to tougher means, our insecurity and lack of skill with them frequently result in destructive aggression and overkill. Because we become fearful in conflict situations, we are unable to be "firm but fair," or to be tough and straight without becoming judgmental.

We are unable to choose and use all the constructive tools that are available to us because we define some of them as *inherently* negative. We commit the reverse of the means-ends fallacy and reject the means without consideration of the likely outcomes. We thus impoverish ourselves of the personal power we need to do our work in situations in which the positional power scales are already loaded against us.

- Against this background I shall propose several propositions about personal power that have guided the work my colleagues and I have been doing in helping both managers and consultants to increase their personal power.

- What makes an influence behavior positive or negative is not whether it is hard or soft, but whether it damages and weakens, or helps and strengthens the other person(s). The toughest behaviors can be used in ways that leave the other person whole and strong. We and others can endure the pain of confrontation, conflict, and occasional defeat without being damaged or weakened thereby.

- Both hard and soft influence behaviors can be used in ways that damage and weaken others. It is easy to see how this works with the tougher styles, less so with the softer ones. Softer styles often wreak their harm through dishonesty, deviousness and deceit, and the buildup of debilitating tensions that occurs when confrontation is continuously blocked.

- When open conflict does occur, and when authority must be used to compel compliance, people who feel strong, and who are confident in their ability to use tougher influence styles, are the least likely to damage or weaken others. People who are upset and fearful when facing conflict and using authority tend toward destructive aggression and overkill when finally provoked to show their strength.

- We all have lots of personal power, and well developed influencing skills, otherwise we would not be able to meet our basic needs. The crucial question is whether those skills are brought into play as a *reaction* to the behavior of others (they "push our buttons"), or whether we choose and use them *intentionally.* The purpose of personal power and influence training is to change oneself from a reactive robot into a proactive human being.

- Until we learn to *choose* our behavior, influencing skill is not a central issue We react with the responses we have learned, in the way we have learned them. When we begin to choose among the possible responses to a situation, we find that we often do not have the skills to implement the approach we have chosen. We all start our lives with a broad spectrum of

personal power potential, but our development is limited and channeled by environment, personal history, and received values.

- Consultants *must* have personal power to do their work, because positional power is not well suited to building the open, trusting and cooperative relationships that we strive to create with our clients. We also need to be able to command respect for our strength and competence, and inspire confidence in our visions of the future. It is when we feel strong and potent in the exercise of the broad spectrum of influence behaviors that we are best able to achieve all of these objectives. To an ever increasing degree, this proposition applies to our clients as well as to ourselves. As positional power is diffused and eroded, personal power becomes more essential, and our clients become more like us in their needs for a wide range of influence skills.

Some of these propositions may be controversial; others are almost self evident. Taken as a group, they provide a coherent foundation for an approach to building and managing consultant-client relationships. That approach is based on *style flexibility* as a consulting ideal. It argues that in educating consultants we should honor and teach all four energy modes in their positive manifestations.

This will require that we stretch both our own and our students' capacities to wield previously underused and avoided influence behaviors. Inevitably this will require confrontation, and hopefully, a stretching of our interpersonal values as well,

as we confront the internal conflicts that these ventures into hitherto rejected uses of power will produce.

I have seen consultants reap rewards for themselves and their clients through increasing the range and depth of their personal power skills. I believe these benefits are available to all who accept the challenge The cost to be paid is that we must confront and overcome two basic and pervasive fears of our own power and the power of others.

The first is the fear that our own power needs will lead us to exploit others and damage our relationships with them. The second is that if we use our personal power freely and openly, we shall provoke competition and attack from powerful people in our environment

Neither of these fears is groundless. However, the alternative to dealing directly and actively with the complexities that they evoke is to remain relatively weak in influence, and turn our backs on the opportunity to contribute much that is of value.