

Power & Influence

Background:

French and Raven (1959), in one of the key papers in the literature on social power, defined Influence; “as a force one person (the agent) exerts on someone else (the target) to induce a change in the target, including changes in behaviours, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs, and values”.

Social Power was subsequently defined;

“as the potential ability of an agent to influence a target.”

Thus, *Influence is “Kinetic Power,” just as Power is “Potential Influence”.*

5 Bases of Power

However, the 1959 paper is more famous for the classification it offers of five different bases of power:

Reward, Coercive, Legitimate, Referent, and Expert power.

A sixth base of power was added later, that of Information (Raven, 1965).

Reward and Coercive Power depends on the agent's ability to bestow on the target positive and negative outcomes, respectively. Using either of these bases will induce only a superficial change in the target; that is, none of the target's privately held beliefs, attitudes, or values are changed. Instead, only public compliance is obtained, the continuation of which depends on successful surveillance of the target by the agent.

Legitimate Power is based on the target's belief that the agent has a legitimate right to exert influence, and that the target has an obligation to accept this influence. It leads to private acceptance that comes from within the target and as such it does not require surveillance by the agent in order to be successful. The most impactful and lasting power base, but the hardest to be given; it needs to be earned!

Referent Power depends on the target's identifying with the agent. It again leads to private acceptance by the target through enabling the target to maintain a satisfactory relationship with the agent and see himself/herself as similar to the target on certain relevant dimensions.

Expert Power of the agent depends on the target's attributing superior knowledge or experience to the agent. When such faith in the agent is present, expert power will again result in private acceptance on the part of the target. The power sits with whoever is perceived as the Expert

Informational Power, finally, leads to internalised change in the target's beliefs, attitudes or values. Contrary to the bases of power previously discussed, informational power is independent both of the person of the agent and of the agent's relationship with the target and is instead based on the perceived relevance and validity of the information.

Reward	agent can bestow +ve outcome	Compliance
Coercive	agent can bestow -ve outcome	Compliance
Legitimate	belief in agent's right to exert	Commitment
Referent	identify with agent	Commitment
Expert	knowledge of agent	Commitment
Informational	validity of information	Compliance