

Forms (Bases) of Power

French & Raven (1959) Blase and O’Hair (1992) Kitzmiller (2013)

As used in *Putting Power into Practice* (November 2024), Sara Shapiro-Plevan, Ed.D.

Type of Power	Definition	Examples
<p>Referent</p>	<p>Referent power is grounded in relationships, affiliations and connections with others. This emphasizes similarity and respect, and primarily uses influence, for positive and negative effect. Note that this is not the same as relational power, but acts as a referent—refers one to another, is not reciprocal or mutual but mono-directional. Referent power is the ability to influence others through the use of admiration, respect, and likability.</p> <p>Referent power is a type of soft power that is based on personal qualities and characteristics and interpersonal skills. Individuals and even leaders with referent power are seen as role models and examples, and those who follow them may imitate or attempt to replicate their actions and behaviors. Referent power may also include the power of ideas to shift people’s thinking and behavior.</p>	<p>Referent power can be used in a wide range of settings, like at work, in interpersonal relationships, friendships, family relationships and even consumer behavior. It shows up as the ability of a leader or boss to influence an employee through respect, admiration, influence, or even encouraging a kind of identification with the leader. It invites a kind of mutuality but is usually one direction, with a “referent” to the leader, where all of the attention is directed toward the leader.</p> <p>Referent power tends to build strong relationships with employees, which boosts morale and creates trusting relationships in the workplace. This is often done when leaders admit to being vulnerable, opening up and offering themselves as examples (both publicly and privately), admitting mistakes, acknowledging vulnerability, complexity or uncertainty, and inviting input. Referent power can also be present in leaders who set clear boundaries like taking vacation time allotted, setting clear boundaries around work-life dynamic (not answering email after hours), and sticking to agendas in meetings (and encouraging their teams to do the same).</p>

<p>Legitimate</p>	<p>Legitimate power is found in elected, selected, or appointed positions of authority and may be undergirded by social norms. It offers the formal power to act inside organizational structures. In general, legitimate power is based in hierarchy and may also come with reward power.</p> <p>Legitimate power is the authority a person holds based on their official position or role within an organization or society, meaning their power is derived from their formal title and is considered valid because others within the system recognize and accept it; essentially, it's the power to influence others due to the position they occupy in a hierarchy. It is accepted by others; people within the system tend to acknowledge the authority of the leader or person with power and their right to make particular demands. They also are able to expect compliance based on their role.</p>	<p>Looking at those who are in appointed or elected positions, CEOs, rabbis and presidents are typically good examples of legitimate power. Excellent examples are leadership and managerial roles in most workplaces, by virtue of their supervisory capacities. A supervisor can assign projects. A board chair can hire and fire. Additional examples can include those who represent the government: state action is a legitimate power, when it comes from the power of a democratically elected government. When it does not, it is no longer legitimate power.</p> <p>People who participate in systems that include legitimate power can often change their beliefs to accommodate or morph into the values and beliefs of the leader who holds the legitimate power, meaning that this leader holds outside power to make change.</p>
<p>Expert</p>	<p>Expert power is based on what one knows, has experienced, and/or the special skills or talents they have accrued. Expertise can be demonstrated by reputation, credentials and actions as well.</p> <p>Expert power is the ability to influence others due to a person's specialized knowledge or skills in a particular area. It's a commonly used form of power in the business world, but can be used in any setting. People with expert power are confident in their knowledge and use it to help others. They tend to be trusted experts and are sought after for guidance and advice. They also typically have a certain level of power and influence in their workplace.</p>	<p>Expert power looks different in different domains. In fundraising and development, it may be the person who is able to raise \$10million, or in an administrative capacity, it is the person at work who has the knowledge of how to use the CRM. Often in Jewish communal workplaces the local expert is often the rabbi even if not needed to be an expert.</p> <p>Examples of expert power include a doctor with specialized training who patients trust for diagnosis and treatment or even a lawyer with a history of winning high-profile cases. It also may include a chef with expert-level skills in Italian cuisine. Those with expert power may receive preferential treatment, opportunities for advancement outside of typical advancement trajectories or schedules, certain levels of job security, and access to networking opportunities.</p>

<p>Relational</p>	<p>Relational power is rooted in the perception of or the actual ability to influence others in a relationship. Typically this is power that is about potential not actual. Relational power is the ability to wield influence without a formal role, or outside of one's formal role. It is visible in multiple contexts, like work or community (group), personal relationships (individual) and on the international scene as well (group).</p> <p>Relational power may appear to be individual but may also be shared. Additionally, it is maintained in increased use and between people, and becomes a valuable power base that can be available for exchange.</p>	<p>Examples of relational power include the person who sits near the bathroom or sits near the watercooler knows all the office gossip. On the org chart, this may include the one who is the one with the relationships, not the one who has the title (SNA vs org chart). An individual with relational power can influence colleagues to participate in a new initiative, even if it requires additional time and resources. At work, an individual with relational power can influence colleagues to participate in a new initiative, even if it requires additional time and resources. A country's relational power is defined by how it uses its material power to develop connections with other countries, perhaps like treaties or other forms of collaboration. And finally, in relationships, relational power can include the ability to be open to the world around you, create yourself through relationships, and sustain internal relationships.</p> <p>Social norms are a form of relational power, as they tend to norm individuals and communities toward what is socially acceptable. This kind of relational power is transferred one on one and is a softer power, but has a maximum impact to change behavior.</p>
<p>Positional</p>	<p>Positional power is acquired by attaining rank or title in an organization or some kind of system. This kind of power typically comes with legitimate power, which offers the formal power to act in an organization. Positional power may also offer access to other forms of power (like reward power). Power comes with the position, not with the person's intellect or skill or charisma. Positional power is based on a person's role and hierarchy, not on their individual traits or abilities, their personality, wealth or connections.</p>	<p>Positional power is often more visible because of the titles or organizational charts that accompany it. For example, C-suite positions naturally have more power. Rabbis or doctors have power. People with formal titles have power. Some leadership power can be positional power, like the president of a country or other leaders. In some cases this is useful, sometimes not, as some use their titles to wield power, for example based on gender or race, but some who have these titles do not use them or are not accorded the same power based on their position. Note that in many cases, charismatic leaders are able to inspire others and bring out the best in them, regardless of their position.</p>
<p>Informational</p>	<p>Informational power is based on access to information, not on formal authority or inherent internal or external</p>	<p>Informational power can be located in financial reports (for example, budget) or who may be laid off, or even who earns</p>

	<p>characteristics. However, informational power is often short-lived because the power dissipates once the information is shared. Informational power means having control over information or knowledge that others need or want, or having information that is perceived to be valuable in some way, that is currency or of value to someone. This can be professional or personal information, and in both cases they can be used in the workplace and can be traded for other information and for relationship value.</p>	<p>what or what kinds of staffing decisions will be made next. For individuals, this is the power that the Chief Finance Officer or the bookkeeper has, or even the Treasurer, or the HR director—to understand what comes next. If they are not tight lipped about what they know, their power can be used dangerously. Some of the most effective leaders use their informational power to empower others, rather than to hoard control over others.</p>
<p>Reward</p>	<p>Reward power is one’s right—or perceived’ right—to reward another, to offer some kind of social, emotional or intellectual reward for doing what is expected or desired. This can be used to motivate or energize, to manipulate or to praise, to increase or lower social status or professional standing. Reward power is both linked to tangible rewards and intangible rewards.</p> <p>This kind of power is based on one’s ability—or right—to reward another, to offer some kind of social, emotional or intellectual reward for doing what is expected or desired.</p>	<p>Reward power might look like employee of the month awards, raises, promotions, bonuses, and other concrete, specific rewards—or it can look like access to opportunities that are not open to all in ways that embrace equity but are specific only to some who “deserve” reward. This may include facetime with senior leaders and board members, representation at forward facing events, or access to leadership, mentors or funders.</p> <p>Examples include wealth, enabling those with power to buy results or relationships. We might see this in donor and funder relationships in non-profits. Reward power may also be located in the person who is selected to head up the internal committee, go to present at the board meeting, is picked for the plum projects, and is always first to be nominated. Often, this can be linked to a number of biases and shows up uncomfortably and unconsciously in ways that help people advance faster than others (see the example of the glass escalator).</p>
<p>Coercive</p>	<p>Coercive power is the use of power by threat of force to gain compliance from another. This use of force may include physical, social, emotional, political, or economic means. The big idea behind this form of power is that someone is coerced to do something that they do not desire to do.</p> <p>Coercive power may be physical, like the force of an army through military might (group) or the force of a police officer (through their role or job), or the physical abuse of a violent person (individual).</p>	<p>Coercive power can be evident in any supervisory relationship: a supervisor who threatens to demote, terminate, or suspend an erring employee, or one who is perceived to have made a mistake. Coercive power can also be located in peer to peer relationships, where one employee is willing to, wants to report on or blow the whistle on another employee. For example, coercive power is found in the termination of anyone who doesn’t comply with organizational values, where employees who don’t align with</p>

		organizational values are terminated for small infractions when the real issue is a misalignment with larger organizational values.
Relinquished	Relinquished power means that a leader hands over authority to another person (in some cases security personnel or admins) within the organization because they lack their own independent power. It can mean giving up or surrendering control or authority over something, essentially letting go of power that one previously held; it signifies the act of voluntarily releasing one's influence or control over a situation or people.	Examples of relinquished power might include a CEO stepping down from their position and handing over control of the company to a new leader, or continuing to serve but refusing to perform the basic elements of their job. Another example might be drawn from the political arena, where a dictator would give up their authority and allow "democratic" elections, assuming that they are in fact able to be democratic. This may also include parents releasing control of their children's life choices or individuals choosing to leave their job or step down from committee or volunteer service.

Questions for Discussion

Which kind of power do you identify with most?

What kinds of power do you see in practice in your workplace?

What kinds of power are most effective in your workplace?

In what ways can these forms or bases of power be leveraged to build trust with their team?

Are there ways in which the Jewish communal workplace might conflate any of these forms or bases of power? For example, in Jewish communal life, might referent and legitimate power ever be conflated?

Are there examples you'd like to add to these definitions? Consider submitting your examples to us at info@genderequityinhiringproject.org