



## Power and Influence

By John P. Kotter



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In today's complex work world, things no longer get done simply because someone issues an order and someone else follows it. Most of us work in socially intricate organizations where we need the help not only of subordinates but of colleagues, superiors, and outsiders to accomplish our goals. This often leaves us in a "power gap" because we must depend on people over whom we have little or no explicit control. This is a book about how to bridge that gap: how to exercise the power and influence you need to get things done through others when your responsibilities exceed your formal authority. Full of original ideas and expert insights about how organizations and the people in them function, Power and Influence goes further, demonstrating that lower-level personnel also need strong leadership skills and interpersonal know-how to perform well. Kotter shows how you can develop sufficient resources of "unofficial" power and influence to achieve goals, steer clear of conflicts, foster creative team behavior, and gain the cooperation and support you need from subordinates, coworkers, superiors even people outside your department or organization. He also shows how you can avoid the twin traps of naivete and cynicism when dealing with power relationships, and how to use your power without abusing it. Power and Influence is essential for top managers who need to overcome the infighting, foot-dragging, and politicking that can destroy both morale and profits; for middle managers who don't want their careers sidetracked by unproductive power struggles; for professionals hindered by bureaucratic obstacles and deadline delays; and for staff workers who have to "manage the boss." This is not a book for those who want to "grab" power for their own ends. But if you'd like to create smooth, responsive working relationships and increase your personal effectiveness on the job, Kotter can show you how and make the dynamics of power work for you instead of against you.

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### Editorial Review

Review

Leslie L. Vadasz

Senior Vice President, Intel Corporation

B. Lyle Shafer

Vice President-- Personnel Resources NCR Corporation

John Kotter has isolated, defined, and articulated one of the most elusive and misunderstood aspects of management. "POWER AND INFLUENCE" is must reading for all staff managers.

Adam Aron

System Director-- Marketing, Pan American World Airways

"POWER AND INFLUENCE" provides brilliant insight into the true nature of the organization. It's about time we all realize that it is "people"-- with all their frailties and foibles-- that run organizations. The movers and shakers in this world have all learned that the art of understanding people is the greatest business skill there is.

Allan Cox

President, Allan Cox & Associates, Inc.

There is the meaning of authority, which we understand pretty well, and the meaning of influence, which we don't. But more important than either is the ability to exercise the power of influence. That's what "POWER AND INFLUENCE" is about. Anyone who takes to heart the lessons of this penetrating book will be sure to enrich his or her ability in this most important area.

John R. Murphy

Director, Executive and Advanced Management Education, GTE Corporation

John Kotter does two remarkable things in this book. First, he puts his finger on what has been making many of us so uncomfortable with the popularized notions of excellence: It is not that we lack excellence in our organizations -- what we lack is enough managers with the power to mobilize various groups and interests to allow this excellence to shine. Second, he liberates the concept of power from the traditional "anything goes" definition and lays out a brilliantly clear personal strategy for capturing the only legitimate, real power in an organization-- the ability to get things done.

Leslie L. Vadasz Senior Vice President, Intel Corporation I really enjoyed this book! Kotter describes complex issues clearly, but without oversimplification. I will certainly recommend "POWER AND INFLUENCE" to my colleagues.

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#### About the Author

John P. Kotter is Chairman of the Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management Area at the Harvard Business School. He has won McKinsey awards for two *Harvard Business Review* articles, "Managing Your Boss" and "Power, Dependence, and Effective Management," and received the 1977 Exxon Award for innovative curriculum design for developing the Self-Assessment and Career Development program at the Harvard Business School. Kotter is author of six books, including *The General Managers* (also published by The Free Press).

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

The basic premise of this book can be stated quite simply: Important changes that are shaping the nature of work in today's complex organizations demand that we become more sophisticated with respect to issues of leadership, power, and influence. With that increased sophistication, we can make our corporations more competitive. We can make rigid bureaucracies more flexible, innovative, and adaptive. We can even make the world of work more exciting and personally satisfying for most people. Without the needed awareness and skill, we risk being overwhelmed by the pathological aspects of modern organizations -- the bureaucratic infighting, parochial politics, destructive power struggles, and the like which regularly reduce initiative, innovation, morale, and excellence in all kinds of organizations.

In the pages that follow, I will identify how the nature of professional and managerial work is changing, why it is changing, why leadership and power issues are becoming increasingly important, and what is required to deal with all this in effective and responsible ways. Most of the examples come from corporate settings. They are applicable, however, in governmental agencies, law firms, hospitals -- almost everywhere. These examples, along with the interpretations offered, do not provide simple cookbook solutions. But they do offer a way of thinking about subtle yet important issues of relevance to those who work in (or are being trained for) today's complex professional, technical, and managerial jobs. People like Andrea, Fred, and John.

I

Andrea is a 28-year-old copywriter for one of the advertising agencies in New York. She is extremely good at her craft; during the seven years she has been in the advertising business, accounts she has worked for have won six major awards for excellence. Most of the time she loves her work, although it has become increasingly frustrating as she has assumed more responsibility. Most of the time she hates her employer.

It seems hard for Andrea to talk about her work for more than a few minutes without making at least one jab at her firm. She rails against the "idiotic bureaucracy" which limits her capacity to do good work, and she tells amusing stories about two account executives for whom she has rather colorful names. She rarely says anything about her salary, but it is clear she is angry about the size of her raises during the last two years. She harbors a suspicion that one of the "incompetents" in the managerial hierarchy is getting even with her for being outspoken about problems in the firm. The wideeyed young woman who mowed from Ann Arbor to New York seven years ago has traded in her midwestern naiveté for big city cynicism.

Down deep Andrea is worried about her future in the firm. She has considered switching agencies, but her

friends tell her it's the same everywhere. When she thinks about conforming and playing "the political game," it makes her want to throw up. She is not sure what other alternatives exist. And that does not make her feel very good. She wishes people would simply leave her alone so she could do the job she loves -- an individual contributor's job. Unfortunately, because of the increasing responsibility she has been given over the past few years, she no longer is in such a job.

This book has been written, in part, for the Andreas of the world.

Fred is an up-and-coming young manager in a well-known *Fortune* 500 company. He is thirty-four years old, has an MBA degree, and has been working for his employer for three years. He enjoys his work immensely and has very ambitious plans for the future.

After graduate school, Fred worked for a management consulting firm for five years. Reflecting on those days, Fred says he never had any difficulty with what he calls "the analytics." The real challenges all had to do with people and relationships: learning how to work effectively on a project team; how to interface with clients; how to develop a good reputation with the partners who controlled work assignments; and, eventually, how to manage a project team himself. The problems encountered in these areas were more difficult and complex than he had anticipated. In retrospect, he thinks he was very naïve when he left school.

For the most part, Fred successfully met all the challenges he faced at the consulting firm and was well thought of when he decided to accept an offer of employment from one of his clients. The new job, director of marketing in a manufacturing division with \$100 million a year in revenues, was too good to turn down.

Since switching employers, Fred has continued to succeed, but not without great effort on his part. When he arrived at the firm, he encountered considerable hostility directed at the "hotshot MBA consultant." He found that a number of the forty individuals who were a part of his marketing group were not doing an adequate job; but unlike at the consulting firm, he couldn't simply stop using them and substitute other more appropriate staff. In the new job, he has, for the first time, had to deal with an engineering department, two manufacturing plants, and a sales force, departments that often behaved like independent fiefdoms. And also unlike at the consulting firm, his boss and his boss's boss have backgrounds that are very different from his own. These differences often seem to lead them to draw conclusions quite different from his. Convincing them of his point of view has been difficult and frustrating at times.

Fred appreciates that dealing with complex interdependent relationships -- with bosses, subordinates, peers, and outsiders -- is at the heart of what his managerial job is all about. And he knows he has learned a great deal in this regard since leaving graduate school. But as his fast-track career continuously pushes new and bigger challenges at him, he sometimes gets exhausted trying to keep up with all he needs to know. And he often wishes that he were given more control, more managerial discretion, over the many activities and people for which he is held accountable.

This book has also been written for the Freds of this world.

John is an executive vice president in a West Coast bank. He is forty-four years old, and has been in banking for most of his career. John is proud of his professional accomplishments to date, and wants very much to use his position of responsibility in a meaningful way.

Banking, like many industries today, is going through some interesting changes. John finds these changes both exciting and a little threatening. He has carefully studied the technological trends, changing governmental regulation, and shifting competitive environment; and he thinks he knows what his bank needs to do over the next five years. But he is worried that these things will not be done.

To get from A (where the bank is now) to B (where it needs to be in five years), his firm has to overcome formidable obstacles. First of all, some powerful individuals, departments, and customers must be convinced that there really is a need for the bank to move toward B. Like all change, such movement will require effort, money, and some inconvenience. These people are not yet convinced that they should pay that price. Second, covert opposition from one of the bank's departments that will lose status in a move to B must be overcome. John knows that will not be easy. Third, the chances of one of the three contenders to succeed the current chief executive officer at the bank will probably go down if the bank makes the kinds of changes John is convinced are necessary. Yet that person's cooperation, or at least compliance, is absolutely necessary.

John is sophisticated enough to foresee all these problems, to recognize the potential for a major power struggle at the bank, and to realize that the bank desperately needs strong leadership at this point in its history. He is less sure, however, how he can best influence events in a positive way.

This book is also written for people like John.

## II

The fundamental purpose of this book is to help people like Andrea, Fred, and John to be more effective in their jobs, and more successful in their careers -- and then, through them, to help make their organizations more competitive, responsive, and responsible. The focus of this effort is on a wide variety of leadership, power, and influence issues -- issues that have been gaining increasing importance in the past few decades. Such issues include:

- \* How to implement important strategic or adaptive change, despite the need for many people's cooperation in the effort, and despite the fact that some of those people are strongly inclined to resist cooperating.
- \* How to foster entrepreneurial and creative behavior inside a firm, despite dozens of bureaucratic obstacles that are difficult or impossible to remove.
- \* How to gain the resources, support, and fair treatment from bosses (even less than completely competent bosses) that one needs to perform a difficult job without succumbing to cheap (and organizationally harmful) political games.
- \* How to avoid developing destructive adversarial relationships with people whose help and cooperation you absolutely need, but who are outside your chain of command (and your direct control) and who tend to be suspicious of you.
- \* How to get subordinates to work together as a team for the greater good, instead of succumbing to the natural tendency to fight with each other and become turf-oriented.
- \* How to avoid becoming a casualty in a corporate power struggle, especially when you are fairly young, weak, and vulnerable.
- \* How to avoid falling into one of the many traps which lead to power misuse -- such as not grooming a successor and not turning over the reins of power at the appropriate time.
- \* In general, how to foster excellence, innovation, and responsiveness and not get bogged down in bureaucracy, parochial politics, or unproductive power struggles.

People do exist who are able to deal with these issues very effectively. You will see some of these individuals used as examples later in the book. But such people are in the minority today. And that is a problem of some significance, because these issues have become enormously important. In my opinion, they will become even more important in the decades to come.

I didn't always think this way. When I first began doing field research and consulting in organizations, I had a very different conception of what the key issues were. Fifteen years ago, I thought the reason many organizations performed poorly was because they lacked "good" or "modern" ideas about products, markets,

market research, control systems, strategic planning, inventory control, etc. I had just learned these "ideas" in graduate school and was all excited about spreading the word to the uneducated masses.

I quickly discovered two things, especially through my consulting:

1. Good ideas are rarely lacking inside even poorly performing firms. As a consultant, all I needed to do was go around and interview enough people, summarize the better ideas, and voila! I would have a first-class report bursting with excellent recommendations.
2. Having a good idea is one thing, implementing it is something else again. The reason firms have excellent ideas in them, and yet still perform poorly, is that the people who have the ideas can't get them implemented. Bureaucratic and political obstacles stifle their creativity and innovation.

After studying this problem for over a decade now, I think I understand why it is that some people are incredibly effective at providing leadership in getting things done inside complex organizations, while most of us are not. It begins with a certain way of thinking about the social milieu in which one operates. This way of thinking about what work" means is different from that held by many of us, especially with regard to issues of power, dependence, and influence.

Most of us, to be blunt, are remarkably naive when it comes to understanding power dynamics in complex organizations. At the same time, others of us are incredibly cynical. Ironically, although the cynics and the naives see themselves as almost opposites in outlook, when it comes to performance in today's managerial and professional jobs, they have very similar problems. Both distort social reality and thus act on bad information, which inevitably produces problems for them. The naives distort reality by viewing it through rose-colored glasses, the cynics look through charcoal-colored protective eyewear.

A couple of years ago I tried an experiment with some of our MBA students to see just how naive or how cynical these very bright and capable young people were. I gave a group of about one hundred of them a five-page description of a business situation in which some major changes were needed. They were given two hours to analyze the situation and write a set of basic (not detailed) recommendations for a particular manager. I then had their responses coded for naiveté and cynicism. The procedure used was straightforward. Whenever someone drew a conclusion or made a recommendation based on an unstated assumption -- one not justified by the data in the five-page description -- that certain people had unselfish motives, or that people had warm and supportive relationships, or that people always wanted to cooperate with each other, the response was given one point for naiveté. Conversely, whenever someone made an unjustified assumption about people having selfish motives, about the existence of adversarial relationships, about the inevitability of conflict among people, or the like, the response was given one point for cynicism. These points were then added up, and each student's paper was put into one of six categories: very naive, somewhat naive, somewhat cynical, very cynical, neither, or very mixed.

Think for a moment. What would you expect the results to be? These people ranged in age from twenty-three to thirtysix. They were all very well educated. Nearly 90 percent had had some full-time business experience. What do you think?

The results:

Naïve 46%

Cynical 18%

Neither 31%

Very mixed 5%

I will have more to say later in the book about why very capable twenty-six-year-olds, like those that participated in the experiment, seem to be so naive (and why some are cynical). Basically it has to do with

the kinds of situations they have been exposed try -- situations almost entirely in educational organizations and in their nuclear families.

I have never been able to do as systematic an experiment with an older group of managers. But my impression is that, among those who are most effective, both the "naive" and the "cynical" percentages would be *much* lower. (For ineffective older managers, I suspect both the "naive" and the "neither" percentages would be somewhat lower, and that the cynical percentage would be much higher.) My sense is that really effective managers and professionals were pretty naive when they were twenty-six, much like my students. But they gave up their naivete during the early stages of their careers for a more complex, sophisticated, and realistic vision of the social reality around them. Ineffective older managers simply traded naive views for cynical ones.

It is also my impression that the process by which effective organizational leaders learn more sophisticated approaches to their work begins with exposure to those approaches, as well as exposure to the pitfalls of more naive or cynical methods. And that, in a nutshell, is what much of this book will attempt to provide.

### III

It is naive to assume that any book by itself can completely reorient a person's way of handling social reality, especially since reading does not necessarily build social skills. But reading can give us new ways of thinking. It can refocus our attention on more important issues and problems. It can help us to reorder our agenda for our own professional development. In these ways, it can help us to help ourselves become more effective at work.

Competent and responsible performance in managerial and professional jobs inside complex organizations is more important today than ever before. At no other time in history has mankind been more dependent on corporations, governments, hospitals, schools, and other organizations. The thousands of goods and services we use, and often take for granted, almost all come from organizations managed by professionals and managers. The very quality of our lives and our environment today is largely determined by these organizations.

Organizational excellence is impossible without individual excellence. And individual excellence today, especially in managerial and professional jobs, demands much more than technical competence. It demands a sophisticated type of social skill: a leadership skill that can mobilize people and accomplish important objectives despite dozens of obstacles; a skill that can pull people together for meaningful purposes despite the thousands of forces that push us apart; a skill that can keep our important corporations and public institutions from descending into a mediocrity characterized by bureaucratic infighting, parochial politics, and vicious power struggles.

Managerial and professional excellence requires the knack of knowing how to make power dynamics in corporate life work for us, instead of against us.

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