

## Managing Power.

### a. What is Power?

By understanding what power is we can help weaker parties to identify sources of power and increase the likelihood that agreements are consensual. Two conceptualizations of power follow. Power in the form of objective properties of a party and power in the less tangible form of Bargaining Strength.

The concept of power is both exceedingly slippery to pin down and yet indispensable in enabling one to analyze a number of important social processes, including that of conflict. In physics, power in use is defined as work actually accomplished per unit of time, but it can also be conceived of as a potential for doing work, as for example in the form of a body of a given mass poised a particular distance above the earth's surface or a 200-horsepower engine. In a similar way, one may refer to a powerful nation or political leader as being one that is capable of accomplishing objectives or controlling other parties. German Sociologist Max Weber defined Power as, "The ability of a man or a number of men to enforce their will even in the face of opposition from others." *Power*, then, is **the ability to make things happen or prevent them from happening**. The following discussion attempts to provide a model for analyzing the outcome of disputes based factors that influence parties' relative power.

From mathematician and theorist Hubert Blalock's point of view power in negotiations can be seen as a battery with a charge. The battery may be fully charged (high on resources) or low (low on resources) (Blalock's "R"esources). The battery may also have more than a single demand on it and these demands take differing amounts of the charge (Blalock's "D"istribution of resources). A car battery may be powering the headlights as well as a radio at the same time. Further, the wiring going to the headlights may be better than that to the radio (Blalock's "E"fficiency).

There will ordinarily be a considerable number of variables that intervene between power resources and power that is actually exerted, so that it will generally require a rather complex model to link the two. By no stretch of the imagination can one assume that a "powerful" party will automatically use its resources to control another actor. Among other things, resources expended need to be replenished. There will be many different and competing purposes for which these same resources may be expended. There are apt to be multiple parties, some of which are of no great interest to the potentially powerful party one is examining.

Furthermore, there are many possible alternative courses of action or means that may be used in the exercise of power and these will also vary in terms of efficiency. Some means will conserve more resources than others. Motives, goals, and beliefs play important roles in determining how and under what conditions resources will actually be employed in a given instance. Theories of power and conflict will need to take these into account.

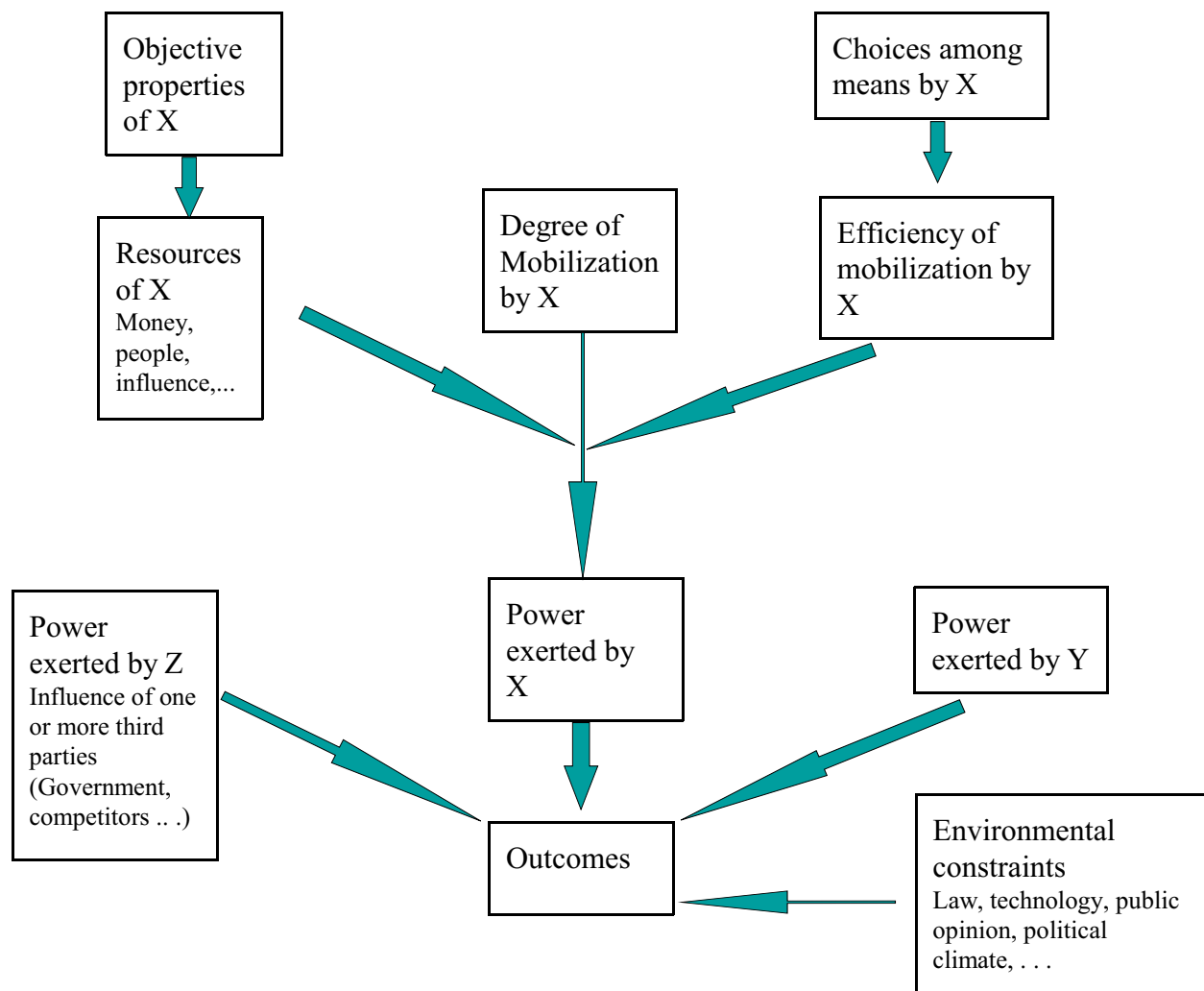
We may take power as exercised (P) as a multiplicative function of three kinds of variables: resources (R), the degree to which these are mobilized (D), and the efficiency of the mobilization effort (E), so that roughly speaking,  $P = kRDE$ .

Note that if either efficiency or degree of mobilization were zero, then no effective power would be realized, regardless of the level of the party's resources. Similarly, if there were no resources available, both degree and efficiency of mobilization would become irrelevant. If there were no power potential to be mobilized, there would hardly be any payoff to be expected by improving efficiency. If both Resource and Degree of mobilization are large, however, then

minor increments in efficiency could have important impacts on the effect of power exerted. If any one term were close to zero, it would take very large values of the other two to bring Power to even an intermediate level.

b. Blalock's Simplified Power Model

Although our models of conflict processes may become highly complex, a very simple model of will indicate the major variables. The focus of attention is on party X, which may be an individual person, a highly organized corporate group, or a much more loosely organized quasi-group composed of multiple parties in a coalition arrangement. It is assumed that the power confrontation is with party Y but that there may be additional third parties Z that may also influence the outcome. A residual set of variables influencing the outcome have been lumped together in the box titled "Environmental Constraints."



In this very general model the resources of X are taken as functions of X's objective properties and the goals of other parties, Y and Z. Efficiency of mobilization is taken as a function of X's choices among available means. The three variables, resources of X, degree of mobilization of X's resources, and efficiency of mobilization of X's resources are assumed to multiply to affect the total amount of power exerted by X. This multiplicative joint effect is represented diagrammatically by having the three arrows join before they reach the "Power Exerted by X" box (X's output), rather than by three arrows that reach it separately. A similar set of variables, not shown in the diagram, is assumed to affect the power exerted by Y and the power exerted by the Z. Outcomes, as distinct from X's output, are influenced by these other actors as well as by a miscellaneous set of environmental factors.

The above is an overly simplified model. First, in the Exchange Theory posits the idea that rational actors will attempt to select among those courses of action that maximize the likelihood of success for a given expenditure of energy. Some means are presumed to be more efficient than others, with it perhaps being advisable to expend a certain fraction of one's total resources to obtain the information necessary to select the optimal strategy. A number of variables will be linked to efficiency of mobilization, with the recognition that the parties to a conflict will also take such factors into consideration, though with possible miscalculations that may be influenced by ideological systems, faulty information, or insufficient foresight. Finally, no feedbacks are shown in this very simple model, but certainly outcomes of one case will affect decisions as to distribution in future negotiations.

c. Bargaining Strength.

Often the most important kinds of power in many negotiations are intangible. In looking at intangibles, we will be concerned with perceptions of power, rather than a quantification of opponents' resources and ability to bring those resources to bear on a given dispute.

Many factors real, assumed and perceived, affect bargaining strength. Negotiators must assess their own real strengths and weaknesses. They must assess those of their opponents as accurately as possible and be careful of the assumptions made in the process. They must think about ways to change their opponents' perceptions of relative strength and they must consider the impact of current actions on long-term relationships with the other.

Bargaining strength is the ability to influence others. Dahl (1957), for example, employs a common type of definition: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do." Dahl's definition, like Blalock's views power as an output, but is more likely to cause us to look for subjective factors as well objective ones.

Unless each party has some source of power, unconditional surrender is more likely than negotiation. Total powerlessness is rare, despite the difficulty and creativity that may be required to identify what little strength a party has.

Bargaining strength has two forms and many sources. The forms are positive, the ability to get things done, and negative, the ability to prevent things from getting done. The latter is particularly important within modern bureaucratic organizations.

Image is power:

Carter was a weak president partly because he seemed uncomfortable with and unlikely to use power; Reagan was a strong president partly because he seemed comfortable with and likely to use power.

Likableness is power.

Reagan survived Irangate, and Nixon was destroyed by Watergate, partly because of likableness or the lack of it.

Ruthlessness is power.

Lyndon Johnson bullied opponents. Hitler and Stalin killed them.

Money and people are power.

In twentieth century American politics, the Republicans have tended to have the former, and the Democrats the latter. Strike negotiations have sometimes turned on the cash flow of the business compared with the size of the union strike fund, or on the availability to the company of nonunion labor compared with the availability to strikers of temporary jobs.

Legitimacy and precedent are power.

Proposals gain power based on such sources of power as published price lists, legal requirements, and consistency with past practices or industry standards. Presidential proposals have more power than ambassadorial ones; compulsory arbitrators have more power than mediators. Published prices, or limited authority to make concessions, legitimate the power of a salesman to resist demands for concessions so increase bargaining strength.

Credibility and trust are power.

Capacity to influence is enhanced by a reputation for candor, honesty, integrity, and commitment to promises - or threats made.

Knowledge is an important source of power.

Among the forms it takes are analytical, circumstantial, creative, legal, substantive, technical, strategic or tactical.

Alternatives and flexibility are power.

The more ways a negotiator has to achieve a goal, the less threatened the negotiator is by the prospect of deadlock with an opponent. A negotiator needing transportation who will consider bus, bicycle, motorcycle, and car has more flexibility than one limited to a car; a car buyer willing to consider several makes has more flexibility than one who will consider only one, and a car buyer in a city with many dealers has more flexibility than one in a small town with only one dealer (who also is a customer of the buyer).

Time is power.

Knowing an opponent's deadline gives a negotiator who has a later one considerable power. But, it is easy to overplay. The trick is to prevent the opponent walking out until it is too late to make a deal with a third party.

Bargaining strength increases with willingness to risk failure, which depends in turn on what is at stake, how the odds of success and failure are assessed, and personality.

Understanding parties bargaining strength is a source of bargaining strength. Factors as conduct, reputation, past bargaining behavior, needs, benefits, and risk proneness should be

considered. Negotiators tend to over-estimate the bargaining strength of others. Understanding translates into an ability to make deals that move toward agreement. The surfacing stage of mediation allows this information to be brought out. The mediator must be very conscious of power imbalances, especially the parties' perceptions of power. A mediator can equalize power by helping the perceived weaker party to identify and assert their needs.

Negotiators with little bargaining strength often rely on trying to improve the bargaining climate, confusing the issue, hot buttons, linkage, or salami slicing. They may try to increase their power by changing the agenda. Those with bargaining strength can make particularly effective use of hot buttons, take it or leave it, and threats.

Communication researcher Jack R. Gibb has found that when a person communicates superiority (power, wealth, physical characteristics, advanced education), he very often arouses defensiveness. In a situation like this, the mediator's job is to "balance" the power - not by deflating egos - but by putting the disputants on the same level. For example, "You know a great deal about this subject but how do you actually feel about this?" Or, "Mrs. Glamor, what are some of the things you and Mrs. Boring have in common here today?"

Another method commonly used to equalize power is to ask the parties to indulge in some role reversal. This will sometimes result in allowing the perceived weaker party to come from a more powerful place perceived stronger party to soften his/her line.

If you have begun the negotiations and an imbalance of power exists and you have attempted the above techniques with no success, you may want to caucus.