

Abstract

Individual Power in Organizations

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Within present-day organizational life are numerous dynamic forces that affect not only leadership but the overall health and progress of the organization and each of its members. One of these, power usage, is at the heart of all organizational action, and is indeed an elemental part of all human interaction. A second dynamic is globalization and its results, the ever-increasing multicultural composition of organizational life and the inter-cultural interaction that is becoming a universal and daily fact of organizational life.

The challenge facing leadership in intercultural organizations globally, whether in business, government, or civic sectors, is to understand the elements of power usage between individuals in the organization, and to successfully practice the principles of effective intercultural power-sharing if the organizations under their leadership are to be healthy and productive. This challenge raises several broader questions which are not addressed in this study but which drive this study's more fundamental initial question. Before one can address questions related to cultural power values, or principles that enhance power-sharing between individuals in intercultural organizations, it is first necessary to understand the nature of individual power in organization. Further, in order to understand the nature of individual power it is necessary to identify the components of individual power, and to have a means of quantifying and mapping these individual power components. It is this pivotal first step that is the focus of this study.

Stated specifically, the research problem is to identify the nature of individual power in organizations and to devise a means of quantifying and mapping the power of individuals in organizations.

In this study the researcher surveys the literature on power and posits a definition of power. He then postulates a theoretical construct of the nature of individual power in organizations that is multidimensional in nature and which is built upon this definition. He outlines three power fields that shape the power of individuals within organizations. Next, the specific power units that make up these power fields are identified. On the basis of this model he designs a research instrument – the Power Sphere Exercise - with which to observe and chart the power of individuals in organizations. This instrument is then field tested in order to determine its validity and usefulness. Finally the results of the field tests are reported and assessed. From the findings the researcher suggests various contributions to the field of knowledge on individual power in organizations, potential applications for leaders and other practitioners within the organizational context, and suggests a number of areas for further research related to the broader context of cultural power values and power-sharing in organizations.