

Power and Politics

*Power is not revealed by striking hard
or often, but by striking true.*

—Honoré de Balzac



Why did a man with such power decide to risk it all? Only Gupta knows for certain.

Source: S. Andrews, "How Gupta Came Undone," *Bloomberg Businessweek* (May 19, 2011), pp. 56–63; M. Gordon and L. Neumeister, "Ex-Goldman Sachs Director Rajat Gupta Charged with Insider Trading," *Washington Post* (March 1, 2011), downloaded June 18, 2011 from www.washingtonpost.com/; W. Pavlo, "Goldman's Boardroom Meetings—Less Proprietary Than Computer Code?" *Forbes* (March 17, 2011), downloaded June 21, 2011, from <http://blogs.forbes.com/>.

In both research and practice, *power* and *politics* have been described as the last dirty words. It is easier for most of us to talk about sex or money than about power or political behavior. People who have power deny it, people who want it try not to look like they're seeking it, and those who are good at getting it are secretive about how they do so.¹ To see whether you think your work environment is political, take the accompanying self-assessment.

A major theme of this chapter is that power and political behavior are natural processes in any group or organization. Given that, you need to know how power is acquired and exercised if you are to fully understand organizational behavior. Although you may have heard that "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," power is not always bad. As one author noted, most medicines can kill if taken in the wrong amount, and thousands die each year in automobile accidents, but we don't abandon chemicals or cars because of the dangers associated with them. Rather, we consider danger an incentive to get training and information that will help us to use these forces productively.² The same applies to power. It's a reality of organizational life, and it's not going to go away. By learning how power works in organizations, you'll be better able to use your knowledge to become a more effective manager.



SELF-ASSESSMENT LIBRARY

Is My Workplace Political?

In the Self-Assessment Library (available on CD and online), take assessment IV.F.1 (Is My Workplace Political?). If you don't currently have a job, answer for your most recent job. Then answer the following questions.

1. How does your score relate to those of your classmates? Do you think your score is accurate? Why or why not?
2. Do you think a political workplace is a bad thing? If yes, why? If no, why not?
3. What factors cause your workplace to be political?

A Definition of Power

- 1 Define *power* and contrast leadership and power.

Power refers to a capacity that *A* has to influence the behavior of *B* so *B* acts in accordance with *A*'s wishes.³

Someone can thus have power but not use it; it is a capacity or potential. Probably the most important aspect of power is that it is a function of **dependence**. The greater *B*'s dependence on *A*, the greater *A*'s power in the relationship. Dependence, in turn, is based on alternatives that *B* perceives and

the importance *B* places on the alternative(s) *A* controls. A person can have power over you only if he or she controls something you desire. If you want a college degree and have to pass a certain course to get it, and your current instructor is the only faculty member in the college who teaches that course, he or she has power over you. Your alternatives are highly limited, and you place a high degree of importance on obtaining a passing grade. Similarly, if you're attending college on funds totally provided by your parents, you probably recognize the power they hold over you. You're dependent on them for financial support. But once you're out of school, have a job, and are making a good income, your parents' power is reduced significantly. Who among us, though, has not known or heard of a rich relative who is able to control a large number of family members merely through the implicit or explicit threat of "writing them out of the will"?

One study even suggests that powerful people might be better liars because they are more confident in their status. Researchers gave one group of research subjects bigger offices and more authority, while another group received smaller offices and less authority. Then half the subjects in each condition were told to steal a \$100 bill and convince an interviewer they hadn't taken it. If they were able to fool the interviewer, they could keep the money. In the interviews, those in positions of power showed fewer signs of dishonesty and stress like shoulder shrugs and stuttering when lying—perhaps because they felt less dependent on others. Recall that this simulation involved only hypothetical, experimentally manipulated power, so imagine the effects when real power is on the line.⁴

One study investigated how people respond to the poor performance of a subordinate dependent on them in a work context.⁵ To study this, a laboratory mockup of a performance review was developed, and participants acted the part of either powerful or unpowerful managers. The result? Powerful managers were more likely to respond to poor performers by either directly confronting them or frankly encouraging them to get training to improve. Less powerful managers enacted strategies not to confront the poor performer, like compensating for poor performance or avoiding the individual altogether. In other words, they were less likely to actively engage in a potential conflict with the subordinate, possibly because they would be more vulnerable if the subordinate wanted to "get revenge" for the negative feedback.

Contrasting Leadership and Power

A careful comparison of our description of power with our description of leadership in Chapter 12 reveals the concepts are closely intertwined. Leaders use power as a means of attaining group goals.

How are the two terms different? Power does not require goal compatibility, merely dependence. Leadership, on the other hand, requires some congruence between the goals of the leader and those being led. A second difference relates to the direction of influence. Leadership focuses on the downward influence on followers. It minimizes the importance of lateral and upward influence patterns. Power does not. In still another difference, leadership research, for the most

power *A capacity that A has to influence the behavior of B so that B acts in accordance with A's wishes.*

dependence *B's relationship to A when A possesses something that B requires.*

part, emphasizes style. It seeks answers to questions such as these: How supportive should a leader be? How much decision making should be shared with followers? In contrast, the research on power focuses on tactics for gaining compliance. It goes beyond the individual as the exerciser of power, because groups as well as individuals can use power to control other individuals or groups.

Bases of Power

2 Contrast the five bases of power.

Where does power come from? What gives an individual or a group influence over others? We answer by dividing the bases or sources of power into two general groupings—formal and personal—and then breaking each of these down into more specific categories.⁶

Formal Power

Formal power is based on an individual's position in an organization. It can come from the ability to coerce or reward, or from formal authority.

Coercive Power The **coercive power** base depends on fear of the negative results from failing to comply. It rests on the application, or the threat of application, of physical sanctions such as the infliction of pain, frustration through restriction of movement, or the controlling by force of basic physiological or safety needs.

At the organizational level, *A* has coercive power over *B* if *A* can dismiss, suspend, or demote *B*, assuming *B* values his or her job. If *A* can assign *B* work activities *B* finds unpleasant, or treat *B* in a manner *B* finds embarrassing, *A* possesses coercive power over *B*. Coercive power can also come from withholding key information. People in an organization who have data or knowledge others need can make those others dependent on them.

Reward Power The opposite of coercive power is **reward power**, with which people comply because it produces positive benefits; someone who can distribute rewards others view as valuable will have power over them. These rewards can be either financial—such as controlling pay rates, raises, and bonuses—or nonfinancial, including recognition, promotions, interesting work assignments, friendly colleagues, and preferred work shifts or sales territories.⁷

Legitimate Power In formal groups and organizations, probably the most common access to one or more of the power bases is through **legitimate power**. It represents the formal authority to control and use organizational resources based on structural position in the organization.

Legitimate power is broader than the power to coerce and reward. Specifically, it includes members' acceptance of the authority of a position. We associate power so closely with the concept of hierarchy that just drawing longer lines in an organization chart leads people to infer the leaders are especially powerful, and when a powerful executive is described, people tend to put the person at a higher position when drawing an organization chart.⁸ When school principals, bank presidents, or army captains speak (assuming their directives are viewed as within the authority of their positions), teachers, tellers, and first lieutenants listen and usually comply.

Personal Power

Many of the most competent and productive chip designers at Intel have power, but they aren't managers and have no formal power. What they have is **personal power**, which comes from an individual's unique characteristics. There are two bases of personal power: expertise and the respect and admiration of others.

Expert Power Expert power is influence wielded as a result of expertise, special skill, or knowledge. As jobs become more specialized, we become increasingly dependent on experts to achieve goals. It is generally acknowledged that physicians have expertise and hence expert power: Most of us follow our doctor's advice. Computer specialists, tax accountants, economists, industrial psychologists, and other specialists wield power as a result of their expertise.

Referent Power Referent power is based on identification with a person who has desirable resources or personal traits. If I like, respect, and admire you, you can exercise power over me because I want to please you.

Referent power develops out of admiration of another and a desire to be like that person. It helps explain, for instance, why celebrities are paid millions of dollars to endorse products in commercials. Marketing research shows people such as LeBron James and Tom Brady have the power to influence your choice of athletic shoes and credit cards. With a little practice, you and I could probably deliver as smooth a sales pitch as these celebrities, but the buying public doesn't identify with you and me. Some people who are not in formal leadership positions nonetheless have referent power and exert influence over others because of their charismatic dynamism, likability, and emotional effects on us.

Nike CEO Mark Parker has expert power. Since joining Nike in 1979 as a footwear designer, Parker has been involved in many of Nike's most significant design innovations.

His primary responsibilities and leadership positions at Nike have been in product research, design, and development. Nike depends on Parker's expertise in leading the company's innovation initiatives and in setting corporate strategy to achieve the growth of its global business portfolio that includes Converse, Nike Golf, and Cole Haan. Parker is shown here introducing Nike's Considered Design during a news conference about the company's latest products that combine sustainability and innovation.



Source: Mark Lennihan/AP Images.

coercive power A power base that is dependent on fear of the negative results from failing to comply.

reward power Compliance achieved based on the ability to distribute rewards that others view as valuable.

legitimate power The power a person receives as a result of his or her position in the formal hierarchy of an organization.

personal power Influence derived from an individual's characteristics.

expert power Influence based on special skills or knowledge.

referent power Influence based on identification with a person who has desirable resources or personal traits.

Which Bases of Power Are Most Effective?

Of the three bases of formal power (coercive, reward, legitimate) and two bases of personal power (expert, referent), which is most important to have? Research suggests pretty clearly that the personal sources of power are most effective. Both expert and referent power are positively related to employees' satisfaction with supervision, their organizational commitment, and their performance, whereas reward and legitimate power seem to be unrelated to these outcomes. One source of formal power—coercive power—actually can backfire in that it is negatively related to employee satisfaction and commitment.⁹

Consider Steve Stoute's company, Translation, which matches pop-star spokespersons with corporations that want to promote their brands. Stoute has paired Gwen Stefani with HP, Justin Timberlake with McDonald's, Beyoncé Knowles with Tommy Hilfiger, and Jay-Z with Reebok. Stoute's business seems to be all about referent power. His firm's work aims to use the credibility of these artists and performers to reach youth culture.¹⁰ In other words, people buy products associated with cool figures because they wish to identify with and emulate them.

Power and Perceived Justice

Individuals in positions of power tend to be blamed for their failures and credited for their successes to a greater degree than those who have less power. In the same way, studies suggest that leaders and managers in positions of power pay greater costs for unfairness and reap greater benefits for fairness.¹¹ Specifically, authorities are given greatest trust when they have a lot of power and their organizations are seen as operating fairly, and the least trust when they have a lot of power and their organizations are seen as operating unfairly. Thus, it appears that people think powerful leaders should have the discretion to shape organizational policies and change unfair rules, and if they fail to do so, they will be seen especially negatively.

Dependence: The Key to Power

The most important aspect of power is that it is a function of dependence. In this section, we show how understanding dependence helps us understand power itself.

The General Dependence Postulate

Let's begin with a general postulate: *the greater B's dependence on A, the more power A has over B*. When you possess anything others require that you alone control, you make them dependent on you, and therefore you gain power over them.¹² If something is plentiful, possessing it will not increase your power. But as the old saying goes, "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king!" Conversely, the more you can expand your own options, the less power you place in the hands of others. This explains why most organizations develop multiple suppliers rather than give their business to only one. It also explains why so many aspire to financial independence. Independence reduces the power others can wield who can limit our access to opportunities and resources.

What Creates Dependence?

Dependence increases when the resource you control is important, scarce, and nonsubstitutable.¹³

Importance If nobody wants what you have, it's not going to create dependence. Because organizations, for instance, actively seek to avoid uncertainty,¹⁴ we should expect that individuals or groups that can absorb uncertainty will be perceived as controlling an important resource. A study of industrial organizations found their marketing departments were consistently rated the most powerful.¹⁵ The researcher concluded that the most critical uncertainty facing these firms was selling their products, suggesting that engineers, as a group, would be more powerful at technology company Matsushita than at consumer products giant Procter & Gamble. These inferences appear to be generally valid. Matsushita, which is heavily technologically oriented, depends heavily on its engineers to maintain its products' technical advantages and quality, and so they are a powerful group. At Procter & Gamble, marketing is the name of the game, and marketers are the most powerful occupational group.

Scarcity Ferruccio Lamborghini, who created the exotic supercars that still carry his name, understood the importance of scarcity and used it to his advantage during World War II. Lamborghini was in Rhodes with the Italian army. His superiors were impressed with his mechanical skills, as he demonstrated an almost uncanny ability to repair tanks and cars no one else could fix. After the war, he admitted his ability was largely due to his having been the first person on the island to receive the repair manuals, which he memorized and then destroyed so as to become indispensable.¹⁶

We see the scarcity–dependence relationship in the power of occupational categories. Where the supply of labor is low relative to demand, workers can negotiate compensation and benefits packages far more attractive than can

Mary Pochobradsky (center) is in a position of power at Procter & Gamble. She is the North American marketing director for P&G's fabric enhancing products that include the Downy brand, one of 24 company brands that each generate more than \$1 billion in sales a year.

Mary is shown here announcing a new marketing campaign for the 50-year-old Downy brand that includes TV ads, social networks, and a live window display at Macy's retail store featuring comedian Mike Birbiglia. At consumer product firms like P&G, marketers are the most powerful occupational group because they control the important resource of selling products.



Source: AP Photo/Al Behrman.

those in occupations with an abundance of candidates. College administrators have no problem today finding English instructors. The market for network systems analysts, in contrast, is comparatively tight, with demand high and supply limited. The bargaining power of computer-engineering faculty allows them to negotiate higher salaries, lighter teaching loads, and other benefits.

Nonsubstitutability The fewer viable substitutes for a resource, the more power control over that resource provides. At universities with strong pressures on the faculty to publish, the more recognition the faculty member receives through publication, the more mobile he or she is, because other universities want faculty who are highly published and visible. Although tenure can alter this relationship by restricting the department head's alternatives, faculty members with few or no publications have the least mobility and are subject to the greatest influence from their superiors.

Power Tactics

3 Explain the role of dependence in power relationships.

What **power tactics** do people use to translate power bases into specific action? What options do they have for influencing their bosses, co-workers, or employees? In this section, we review popular tactical options and the conditions that may make one more effective than another.

Research has identified nine distinct influence tactics:¹⁷

- **Legitimacy.** Relying on your authority position or saying a request accords with organizational policies or rules.
- **Rational persuasion.** Presenting logical arguments and factual evidence to demonstrate a request is reasonable.
- **Inspirational appeals.** Developing emotional commitment by appealing to a target's values, needs, hopes, and aspirations.
- **Consultation.** Increasing the target's support by involving him or her in deciding how you will accomplish your plan.
- **Exchange.** Rewarding the target with benefits or favors in exchange for following a request.
- **Personal appeals.** Asking for compliance based on friendship or loyalty.
- **Ingratiation.** Using flattery, praise, or friendly behavior prior to making a request.
- **Pressure.** Using warnings, repeated demands, and threats.
- **Coalitions.** Enlisting the aid or support of others to persuade the target to agree.

Some tactics are more effective than others. Rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, and consultation tend to be the most effective, especially when the audience is highly interested in the outcomes of a decision process. Pressure tends to backfire and is typically the least effective of the nine tactics.¹⁸ You can also increase your chance of success by using two or more tactics together or sequentially, as long as your choices are compatible.¹⁹ Using both ingratiation and legitimacy can lessen negative reactions to your appearing to dictate outcomes, but only when the audience does not really care about the outcome of a decision process or the policy is routine.²⁰

Let's consider the most effective way of getting a raise. You can start with rational persuasion: figure out how your pay compares to that of peers, or land

a competing job offer, or show objective results that testify to your performance. Kitty Dunning, a vice president at Don Jagoda Associates, landed a 16 percent raise when she e-mailed her boss numbers showing she had increased sales.²¹ You can also make good use of salary calculators such as Salary.com to compare your pay with comparable others.

But the effectiveness of some influence tactics depends on the direction of influence.²² As Exhibit 13-1 shows, rational persuasion is the only tactic effective across organizational levels. Inspirational appeals work best as a downward-influencing tactic with subordinates. When pressure works, it's generally downward only. Personal appeals and coalitions are most effective as lateral influence. Other factors that affect the effectiveness of influence include the sequencing of tactics, a person's skill in using the tactic, and the organizational culture.

You're more likely to be effective if you begin with "softer" tactics that rely on personal power, such as personal and inspirational appeals, rational persuasion, and consultation. If these fail, you can move to "harder" tactics, such as exchange, coalitions, and pressure, which emphasize formal power and incur greater costs and risks.²³ Interestingly, a single soft tactic is more effective than a single hard tactic, and combining two soft tactics or a soft tactic and rational persuasion is more effective than any single tactic or combination of hard tactics.²⁴ The effectiveness of tactics depends on the audience.²⁵ People especially likely to comply with soft power tactics tend to be more reflective and intrinsically motivated; they have high self-esteem and greater desire for control. Those likely to comply with hard power tactics are more action-oriented and extrinsically motivated and are more focused on getting along with others than on getting their own way.

People in different countries prefer different power tactics.²⁶ Those from individualistic countries tend to see power in personalized terms and as a legitimate means of advancing their personal ends, whereas those in collectivistic countries see power in social terms and as a legitimate means of helping others.²⁷ A study comparing managers in the United States and China found that U.S. managers prefer rational appeal, whereas Chinese managers preferred coalition tactics.²⁸ These differences tend to be consistent with the values in these two countries. Reason is consistent with the U.S. preference for direct confrontation and rational persuasion to influence others and resolve differences, while coalition tactics align with the Chinese preference for meeting

Exhibit 13-1 Preferred Power Tactics by Influence Direction

| Upward Influence | Downward Influence | Lateral Influence |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Rational persuasion | Rational persuasion | Rational persuasion |
| | Inspirational appeals | Consultation |
| | Pressure | Ingratiation |
| | Consultation | Exchange |
| | Ingratiation | Legitimacy |
| | Exchange | Personal appeals |
| | Legitimacy | Coalitions |

power tactics Ways in which individuals translate power bases into specific actions.

Power Distance and Innovation

Throughout this book, you may have noticed a lot of international research into the differences between individualistic and collectivistic countries. Differences in power distance between countries are also likely to affect organizational behavior. *Power distance* is the extent to which people with low levels of power in society accept and expect that power will be distributed unequally. Cultures high in power distance tend to have greater differentiation between leaders and followers in organizations, and less power sharing between employees and upper management.

How does power distance affect the development and implementation of new ideas in organizations? One study that looked at data from 212 Chinese

firms found control mechanisms and strict rules in higher power-distance organizations to be associated with lower levels of information exchange and experimentation. This implies fewer opportunities for creation of new knowledge when power distance is great.

Power distance might also restrict the implementation of new workplace practices. A study across 16 European countries with different levels of power distance showed that innovative work practices like job rotation, autonomous teams, job autonomy, and upward communication were less common in countries with higher power distance. Similar results were obtained in a study of 743 workers in Turkey. This tendency toward less empowerment in high power distance cultures

probably reflects the stronger preferences among workers and managers alike for hierarchical social relationships. However, it may come with a price, because power sharing and autonomy-enhancing practices are most likely to lead to greater innovation.

Source: Based on A. Olló-López, A. Bayo-Moriones, and M. Larrazza-Kintana, "The Impact of Country Level Factors on the Use of New Work Practices," *Journal of World Business* 46, no. 3 (2011), pp. 394–403; D. Wang, Z. Su, and D. Yang, "Organizational Culture and Knowledge Creation Capability," *Journal of Knowledge Management* 15, no. 3 (2011), pp. 363–373; and N. D. Cakar and A. Ertürk, "Comparing Innovation Capability of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Examining the Effects of Organizational Culture and Empowerment," *Journal of Small Business Management* 48, no. 3 (2010), pp. 325–359.

difficult or controversial requests with indirect approaches. Research also has shown that individuals in Western, individualistic cultures tend to engage in more self-enhancement behaviors (such as self-promotion) than individuals in more collectivistic Eastern cultures.²⁹

People differ in their **political skill**, or their ability to influence others to enhance their own objectives. The politically skilled are more effective users of all the influence tactics. Political skill also appears more effective when the stakes are high—such as when the individual is accountable for important organizational outcomes. Finally, the politically skilled are able to exert their influence without others detecting it, a key element in being effective (it's damaging to be labeled political).³⁰ However, these individuals also appear most able to use their political skills in environments marked by low levels of procedural and distributive justice. When an organization is run with open and fairly applied rules, free of favoritism or biases, political skill is actually negatively related to job performance ratings.³¹

Finally, we know cultures within organizations differ markedly—some are warm, relaxed, and supportive; others are formal and conservative. Some encourage participation and consultation, some encourage reason, and still others rely on pressure. People who fit the culture of the organization tend to obtain more influence.³² Specifically, extraverts tend to be more influential in team-oriented organizations, and highly conscientious people are more influential in organizations that value working alone on technical tasks. People who fit the culture are influential because they can perform especially well in the domains deemed most important for success. In other words, they are influential because they are competent. Thus, the organization itself will influence which subset of power tactics is viewed as acceptable for use.

Sexual Harassment: Unequal Power in the Workplace

- 4 Identify nine power or influence tactics and their contingencies.



Source: Bill Greblatt/UPI/Newscom.

A federal jury awarded this young woman a \$95 million judgment in a sexual harassment lawsuit against her employer Aaron's Rents. She reported that her supervisor, the store's general manager, sexually harassed her with hostile and abusive behavior that included lewd propositions and unwanted physical sexual contact. She alleged that she called a company harassment hotline but that an investigator never contacted her and that she was denied a promotion for complaining about her boss's behavior. In their verdicts, the jurors found the supervisor guilty of assault and battery and the company liable for negligent supervision, sexual harassment, and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

Sexual harassment is wrong. It can also be costly to employers. Just ask executives at Walmart, the World Bank, and the United Nations.³³ Mitsubishi paid \$34 million to settle a sexual harassment case. And a former UPS manager won an \$80 million suit against UPS on her claims it fostered a hostile work environment when it failed to listen to her complaints of sexual harassment. Of course, it's not only big organizations that run into trouble: A jury awarded Janet Bianco, a nurse at New York's Flushing Hospital, \$15 million for harassment she suffered at the hands of Dr. Matthew Miller. After the verdict, Bianco said, "I think that people take it lightly when you say sexual harassment. They don't understand how it affects your life, not only in your job, but in your home, with your friends."³⁴

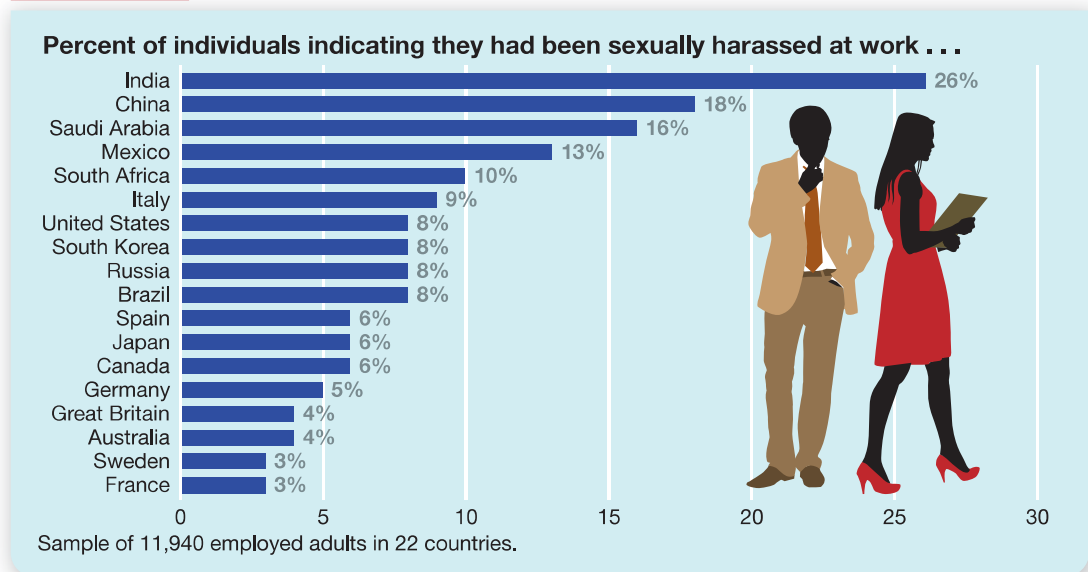
In addition to the legal dangers to sexual harassment, obviously it can have a negative impact on the work environment, too. Sexual harassment negatively affects job attitudes and leads those who feel harassed to withdraw from the organization. In many cases, reporting sexual harassment doesn't improve the situation because the organization responds in a negative or unhelpful way. When organizational leaders make honest efforts to stop the harassment, the outcomes are much more positive.³⁵

Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted activity of a sexual nature that affects an individual's employment and creates a hostile work environment. The U.S. Supreme Court helped to clarify this definition by adding a key test for determining whether sexual harassment has occurred—when comments or behavior in a work environment "would reasonably be perceived, and [are] perceived, as hostile or abusive."³⁶ But disagreement continues about what *specifically* constitutes sexual harassment. Organizations have generally made progress toward limiting overt forms of sexual harassment. This includes unwanted physical touching, recurring requests for dates when it is made clear the person isn't interested, and coercive threats that a person will lose his or her job for refusing a sexual proposition. Problems today are likely to surface around more subtle forms of sexual harassment—unwanted looks or comments, off-color jokes, sexual artifacts like pinups posted in the workplace, or misinterpretations of where the line between being friendly ends and harassment begins.

A recent review concluded that 58 percent of women report having experienced potentially harassing behaviors, and 24 percent report having experienced sexual harassment at work.³⁷ Other research suggests that despite increased media attention and training, perceptions of sexual harassment levels have been fairly stable since the 1990s.³⁸ One problem with reporting is that sexual harassment is, to some degree, in the eye of the beholder. Women are more likely than men to see a given behavior or set of behaviors as constituting sexual harassment. Men are less likely to see harassment in such behaviors as kissing someone, asking for a date, or making sex-stereotyped jokes. As the authors of one study note, "Although progress has been made at defining sexual harassment, it is still unclear as to whose perspective should be taken."³⁹ Witnesses offering sexual harassment testimony also find that victims who took

political skill The ability to influence others in such a way as to enhance one's objectives.

sexual harassment Any unwanted activity of a sexual nature that affects an individual's employment and creates a hostile work environment.

OB Poll**Reports of Sexual Harassment Differ by Country**

Note: Sample of 11,940 employed adults in 22 countries.

Source: J. Wright, "Physical Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace" *Ipsos Global Advisory* (August 12, 2010), downloaded June 20, 2011, from www.ipsos-na.com/.

either an aggressive or a passive tone in making their complaints were seen as less plausible than victims who took a more neutral tone.⁴⁰ This research suggests that people may not be able to be entirely objective when listening to sexual harassment complaints, taking the tone of the victim into account when making judgments rather than simply relying on the facts of the case at hand. The best approach is to be careful—refrain from any behavior that may be taken as harassing, even if that was not the intent. Realize that what you see as an innocent joke or hug may be seen as harassment by the other party.

Most studies confirm that the concept of power is central to understanding sexual harassment.⁴¹ This seems true whether the harassment comes from a supervisor, a co-worker, or an employee. And sexual harassment is more likely to occur when there are large power differentials. The supervisor–employee dyad best characterizes an unequal power relationship, where formal power gives the supervisor the capacity to reward and coerce. Because employees want favorable performance reviews, salary increases, and the like, supervisors control resources most employees consider important and scarce. Thus, sexual harassment by the boss typically creates the greatest difficulty for those being harassed. If there are no witnesses, it is the victim's word against the harasser's. Has this boss harassed others, and, if so, will they come forward or fear retaliation? Male respondents in one study in Switzerland who were high in hostile sexism reported higher intentions to sexually harass in organizations that had low levels of justice, suggesting that failure to have consistent policies and procedures for all employees might actually increase levels of sexual harassment.⁴²

Women in positions of power in an organization can be subjected to sexual harassment from males who occupy less powerful positions, although this situation doesn't get nearly as much attention as harassment by a supervisor. The employee devalues the woman in power by highlighting traditional gender stereotypes that reflect negatively on her (such as helplessness, passivity, or lack of career commitment), usually in an attempt to gain power over her or minimize power differentials. Increasingly, too, there are cases of women in positions of power harassing male employees.

An Ethical Choice

Should All Sexual Behavior Be Prohibited at Work?

The difficulty in monitoring and defining sexual harassment at work has led some organizations to go beyond discouraging overt sexually harassing behaviors. Companies ranging from Walmart to Staples to Xerox have disciplined employees for workplace romances and upheld policies that ban hierarchical romantic relationships, such as between a supervisor and subordinate. The idea is that such relationships are so fraught with potential for abuse of power that they cannot possibly be consensual for extended periods of time. Surveys by the Society of Human Resource Management suggest that concerns about both potential sexual harassment and lowered productivity have motivated prohibitions on workplace romances. However, ethicists and legal scholars have thrown some “no romance” policies into question on the grounds they are patronizing or invade employee privacy.

What does organizational behavior research have to say about *consensual* sexual behavior at work? One study of more than 1,000 respondents found 40 percent were exposed to sexual behavior in some form in the past year. Counter to the idea that all sexual behavior at work is negative, some female and many male respondents reported enjoying the experience. However, exposure to sexual behavior at work was negatively related to performance and psychological well-being. People may report enjoying it, but it might be hurting their productivity and well-being anyway.

When thinking about a sexual harassment policy for your own organization that might prohibit all workplace romances, consider the following questions:

1. Are there potential problems in monitoring and enforcing such a comprehensive policy on all employees?
2. Does the organization have the right to actively determine what types of behaviors consenting employees engage in outside the work environment?
3. Can the policy be written in a less restrictive manner, such as by prohibiting employees who work together closely from having workplace romances? In this way, the organization might be able to transfer employees who are in a relationship so they don't work directly with one another, and thus they can be retained in the organization and their personal privacy respected.

Source: Based on J. L. Berdahl and K. Aquino, “Sexual Behavior at Work: Fun or Folly?” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 94, no. 1 (2009), pp. 34–47; and C. Boyd, “The Debate over the Prohibition of Romance in the Workplace,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 97, no. 2 (2010), pp. 325–338.

A recent review of the literature shows the damage caused by sexual harassment. As you would expect, victims report lower job satisfaction and diminished organizational commitment as a result. Sexual harassment undermines their mental and physical health, as well as lowering productivity in the group in which they work. The authors of this study conclude that sexual harassment “is significantly and substantively associated with a host of harms.”⁴³

Sexual harassment can wreak havoc on an organization, not to mention on the victims themselves, but it can be avoided. The manager's role is critical. Here are some ways managers can protect themselves and their employees from sexual harassment:

1. Make sure an active policy defines what constitutes sexual harassment, informs employees they can be fired for sexually harassing another employee, and establishes procedures for making complaints.
2. Reassure employees they will not encounter retaliation if they file a complaint.
3. Investigate every complaint, and inform the legal and human resource departments.
4. Make sure offenders are disciplined or terminated.
5. Set up in-house seminars to raise employee awareness of sexual harassment issues.

The bottom line is that managers have a responsibility to protect their employees from a hostile work environment, but they also need to protect themselves. Managers may be unaware that one of their employees is being sexually harassed. But being unaware does not protect them or their organization. If investigators believe a manager could have known about the harassment, both the manager and the company can be held liable.

Politics: Power in Action

- 5** Show the connection between sexual harassment and the abuse of power.

When people get together in groups, power will be exerted. People want to carve out a niche from which to exert influence, earn rewards, and advance their careers. When employees in organizations convert their power into action, we describe them as being engaged in politics. Those with good political skills have the ability to use their bases of power effectively.⁴⁴

Definition of Organizational Politics

There is no shortage of definitions of *organizational politics*. Essentially, this type of politics focuses on the use of power to affect decision making in an organization, or on self-serving and organizationally unsanctioned behaviors.⁴⁵ For our purposes, **political behavior** in organizations consists of activities that are not required as part of an individual's formal role but that influence, or attempt to influence, the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organization.⁴⁶

This definition encompasses what most people mean when they talk about organizational politics. Political behavior is outside specified job requirements. It requires some attempt to use power bases. It includes efforts to influence the goals, criteria, or processes used for decision making. Our definition is broad enough to include varied political behaviors such as withholding key information from decision makers, joining a coalition, whistleblowing, spreading rumors, leaking confidential information to the media, exchanging favors with others in the organization for mutual benefit, and lobbying on behalf of or against a particular individual or decision alternative.

The Reality of Politics

Interviews with experienced managers show that most believe political behavior is a major part of organizational life.⁴⁷ Many managers report some use of political behavior is both ethical and necessary, as long as it doesn't directly harm anyone else. They describe politics as a necessary evil and believe someone who *never* uses political behavior will have a hard time getting things done. Most also indicate they had never been trained to use political behavior effectively. But why, you may wonder, must politics exist? Isn't it possible for an organization to be politics free? It's *possible*—but unlikely.

Organizations are made up of individuals and groups with different values, goals, and interests.⁴⁸ This sets up the potential for conflict over the allocation of limited resources, such as departmental budgets, space, project responsibilities, and salary adjustments.⁴⁹ If resources were abundant, then all constituencies within the organization could satisfy their goals. But because they are limited, not everyone's interests can be satisfied. Furthermore, gains by one individual or group are often *perceived* as coming at the expense of others within the organization (whether they are or not). These forces create real competition among members for the organization's limited resources.



Source: Kyodo News/AP Images.

After police officer Toshio Semba (center) blew the whistle on his bosses in the police department, they took his gun away, claiming he was too emotionally unstable to carry a weapon, and reassigned him as a dispatcher. Semba revealed that for decades his superiors wrote false reports to secure public funds and then used the funds for their personal benefit. A district court in Japan ruled that Semba's treatment was retaliation for his exposure of corruption. Traditionally, whistleblowers in Japan have been viewed as traitors, and their exposure of wrongdoing as a betrayal of their superiors. But this perception of whistleblowing as a political behavior is changing as employees like Semba are now being recognized for doing the right thing by exposing illegal, corrupt, or unethical conduct in the workplace.