

Secret Intelligence Service

Room No. 15

(C-IV)

Interpersonal Influence and Power



One should aim for collaborative, rather than competitive dialogues

One should be aware of the power balance in a relationship and use it to one's advantage

One should, having understood a relationship, work to develop it

One should work to improve skills as a communicator

One should, at the start, define clear objectives and goals

This is about power within relationships and how to understand and use what is discussed to one's advantage.

The quality of a dialogue depends upon two factors; the quality of the basic relationship between the parties involved, and the quality of the communication which transpires. A good relationship with good communication between parties should enable successful dialogue. A poor relationship with poor communication is unlikely to amount to much at all.

The nature of a relationship in turn has an impact upon the quality of communication within it. If one does not trust someone, one is in danger of either disregarding what the other says, or seeking for hidden meanings which might or might not actually exist. The nature of a relationship impacts heavily upon dialogue and is a major influencing factor on the likelihood of satisfactory outcomes.

We can look at relationships from a different direction - that involving power - and see how this particular viewpoint is likely to have an effect upon dialogue tactics.

When one becomes aware of something or of someone for the first time, one enters into a relationship with that thing or that person. Relationships can constitute quite elementary forms - one's relationship with someone who checks you out at the supermarket, or wherever - one's relationship with one's parents, is another example. As relationships become more complex, they can be acknowledged via a growing degree of dependence - in other words, how much one needs whoever or whatever it is.

Dependence is different from liking. One might like the person one chats with occasionally while on the train or in the supermarket, but one does not need them; however, one might thoroughly dislike one's superior and yet depend upon that person for guidance and support and, ultimately, for one's livelihood. Similarly, one might not like the person with whom one is engaging dialogue, and yet be dependent on them for information, co-operation and agreement.

Dependence can be awkward to admit because it defines vulnerability. Dependence sketches out the invisible arena within which one must operate because crossing the line can be risky - one's superior might discipline, one's fellow in a dialogue might withdraw. Of course, one has others who are dependent upon us, but is usually one's own dependence - one's own vulnerability - that is difficult to confront and to accept.

Like it or not, however, dependence, vulnerability, and consequently power, are influencing factors in all relationships. One might feel that one controls the power balance, that one is subject to it, or

that it is equal. Nevertheless, it exists and it is a very major influencing factor.

Power Typology

French and Raven (1), identified eight types of power in research which they carried out during the 1950s.

Positional power

This type of power derives from one person's position in relation to another. For instance, a manager may have power because of the position that he or she occupies, whereas a supervisor may have less power because of the way in which people perceive their relative positions. Bear in mind that the people who are subject to it award this type of power to the person in question. Positional power is characterized by a need for the relationship to continue.

Information power

The more information that one has, the more one feels able to control what is going on. This form of control involves one person having more information than another, and using that information to control the other person's uncertainty. People can become dependent upon others because of their need to control their own uncertainty.

Control of rewards

This refers to owning the power to reward for desired performance or behavior. This type of power creates dependency upon the person conferring the reward.

Coercive power

This refers to owning the power to discipline for failure to behave in a desired fashion. This type of power is also likely to create dependency. People can depend on not being punished as well as depend on being rewarded.

Alliances and networks

This is an extended form of information power bound with positional power.

Access to and control of agendas

If a person or an organization can control the agenda in a dialogue situation, they can effectively set the ground rules. This means that they can legislate for the introduction of items that are favorable to themselves and for items that are unfavorable to be blocked. If the

agenda is controlled, one of the parties to a relationship can be dependent upon the other to explain the rules for communication and subsequent dialogue.

Control of meaning and of symbols

This refers to power whereby one party will dominate the other by virtue of means of use of language, or the situation in which the relationship transpires. The judicial system is a system which uses control of meaning to a large extent with its own language and arcane symbols so to support its power. Bank managers and lawyers utilize this type of power to some extent also. Consider the setting of a lawyer's office and the content of discussions.

Personal power

This may also be referred to as referent power and is the type of power that leaps from the desire to be like someone, because one feels that they, the other, own some desirable qualities.

The Use of Power

Dialogue is about power. There are always power imbalances in a relationship, dialogue transpires all the time. No matter what one's overall approach to dialogue is, one may need to consider the nature of power. Remember that the power in the relationship will influence the dialogue process and that dialogue is not limited to a formal across the table session.

It is, of course, very rare that one will find that there is only one type of power in a relationship. In the case of a lawyer for example, he or she is likely to have six or seven of the types of power listed heretofore. Once one has identified the types of power that are involved in the relationship, one can cast a strategy in a manner which will help one work successfully in that relationship.

Regarding the example of the lawyer; lawyers own positional power and information power. They will own reward power and conceivably coercive power, although this latter (coercive power) is likely to be illusory. They will have access to alliances and networks, and control of agendas. They will certainly have control of meaning and symbols in the form of their office setting and the way in which they dress. This power is dependency inducing. One will be dependent upon a lawyer for his or her knowledge of the judicial system wherein the law sits. Where the lawyer controls the agenda, one will be dependent upon him or her to explain all the rules in detail. Some assert that dialogue is about developing strategies that will decrease or increase the dependency of one of the parties in a negotiation. The lawyer will use strategies that will attempt to

increase dependency, whether or not he or she is a law breaker. One should use strategies which reduce dependence on the law. These can correspond to the power strategies that the lawyer may wittingly or unwittingly use.

The first type of strategy is knowing the area in which one is going to dialogue. If one is asking for advice, the more one knows both about the relevant aspects of the law and the particular aspect for which one is seeking advice, the less dependent one will be upon the lawyer.

The second is to maintain flexibility in one's commitment to one lawyer. One should approach as many sources of advice as possible. If a lawyer is aware that you are not dependent upon him or her, one's dialogue position will be far stronger.

The third is to develop one's own networks and alliances. When a lawyer is aware that one knows other people in the area in which one proposes to discuss, one's potential dependency upon him or her as the only source of guidance is reduced.

The fourth is to manipulate rewards so that the lawyer will feel good with regard to assisting. One may have rewards in a power 'bank' that one does not use or possibly not realize that one has. People can feel rewarded when they are involved in an obviously successful project for which they can expect to receive praise. The lawyer (or anyone) is not immune to rewards.

The fifth refers to one's manipulate meaning and symbol. One's first meeting with a lawyer is likely to be on his or her territory. Respond by inviting him or her to a second meeting on your territory, or close. Set a stage for his or her visit.

The sixth is to use one's own personal power. If one appears confident and relaxed, whilst committed to one's appeal or whatever, one may be able to induce a lawyer to assist because of this.

Power may be real or imagined. Try to ascertain the extent of actual power held by the other party. The fact is that if one accepts illusory power as real, then it is real.

Try not to be intimidated by the setting in which one finds oneself. Much power may be created simply by setting the stage and whilst one should be prepared to use this tactic to one's own advantage, one should beware of having it used against one by others.

Even if one assumes that the whip hand is owned, aim for collaborative rather than competitive negotiation. Win - win outcomes are the most suitable for all concerned.

References

(J.R.P. French and B. H. Raven, 'The Bases of Social Power' in 'Studies for Social Power', D. Cartwright (ED.), Institute for Social Power, 1959.)

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Adversitate. Custodi. Per Verum

