

## Types of Power in Relationships

There is little doubt that *the ability to influence strategically and effectively* is vital for leaders in business today. There are many aspects to effective influence; one is a growing understanding of where power comes from in the workplace. People tend to follow those who have power, and because others follow, the 'powerful' person has influence. Power here does not mean control – it is important to recognise the types and the source of power that occur in all relationships.

One of the most notable studies on power was conducted by social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven in 1959. They identified five bases of power:

1. **Legitimate** – based on the belief that a person has the right to make demands, and expect compliance and obedience from others.
2. **Reward** – based on one person's ability to compensate another for compliance.
3. **Coercive** – based on the belief that a person can punish others for noncompliance.
4. **Expert** – based on a person's superior skill and knowledge.
5. **Referent** – the result of a person's perceived attractiveness, worthiness, and right to respect from others.

**Legitimate** power exists through social hierarchies, cultural norms, and organizational structures, and can be effective in these contexts. However if you lose the position you lose the power. A leader needs more than legitimate power; in fact, a leader may not need this at all!

People in positions are often able to give out **rewards**, and these can be effective when others believe in their value. When used frequently, however, rewards often lose their effectiveness.

**Coercive** power can be subject to abuse, causing unhealthy behavior and dissatisfaction in the workplace.

When you are able to understand a situation, suggest solutions, use solid judgment, and generally outperform others you demonstrate **expert** power, and as a result people tend to trust you and respect what you say. This can be one of the best ways to improve your influence skills.

**Referent** power comes from one person liking and respecting another, this may be thought of as charisma, charm, admiration, or appeal. This can be an effective form of influence; but can be abused quite easily. Someone who is likable, but lacks integrity and honesty, may use that power to gain personal advantage. However referent power that comes from respect for character, values and integrity (which some term **personal** power) is a foundation of solid and lasting influence.

*What types of power do you see most readily used in your environment?*

*What do you rely on to influence the behaviour your team?*

*How do you most effectively influence your peers and your manager?*

*What could you do differently to achieve greater and lasting influence?*