Further readings and templates

# Chapter 11: Team working

## Power in team membership

One of the reasons that teams can fail is that individuals within the team use power in a way which restricts the team from achieving its objectives, and whilst it is preferable to believe that power only comes from being a leader, it is incorrect. Individual members within a team can also have power. Buchanan and Badham (1999) noted that team members (and anyone in an organisation) can do a number of things to create and use power, as identified in the table below.

**Table: Ways that Individuals Create and Use Power**

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| There are a number of ways that individuals working in teams and organisations can create power – or create the perception that they have power. To create power when the organisation or the team gives you none is highly unethical, but it is what some individuals do.Some of these would be seen as grounds for disciplinary action by many managers, but as a potential leader, you need to be aware of what others might try to do.*Image building*: Some team members might pretend to others (especially those who don’t know them) that they are more influential and have certain relations with folk in power than they really do.*Selective information*: Individuals might ensure that people only get to hear negative information about others – or partial information that will discredit others.*‘Scapegoating’*: Individuals might be blamed for mistakes made by others, and on some occasions, someone more important might be blamed for a mistake (e.g. by not providing appropriate support or resources), in order to ensure that the more important individual loses credibility.*Formal alliances and networking*: Creating relationships with people who have access to resources or other relationships that can help them get hold of what they need (and sometimes people will need/want more power).*Compromise*: Sometimes giving up a particular point of view or request can gain respect. This doesn’t mean that a leader should see everyone who agrees with them as really wanting power, but demonstrates that some people can want to create an impression of appearing to be reasonable for their own goals.*Rule manipulation*: Some folk can argue that the rules developed by one person are creating unintended problems, and that those rules need to be removed – thereby reducing the credibility of the individuals concerned.*Creating rumour*: In order to gain some power, some individuals can create gossip and rumour about things which are not real – or things that they have heard an unnamed third person talk about, but which are ‘entirely confidential’ (i.e. fictitious) to the individuals having the discussion. People tend not to have sufficient time or energy to confirm the truth of rumours, and anything ‘interesting’ is often seen as something worthy of spreading around. |

All of the above techniques – and others – can be used by individuals to create a perception of influence and power, and in the process to gain more power. In a small team with a good leader, the opportunities for someone to use these tools will be very limited, but they are more common in a larger organisation where communication and politics are more difficult to control.

### Reference

Buchanan, D. and Badham, R. (1999) *Power, Politics and Organizational Change: Winning the Turf Game*. London: Sage.