

# Distinguishing Power from Leadership

Sultan Gashgari

**Abstract** - This paper looks at five published articles that account for results from an investigation carried out about the definition of power and how it differs from leadership. The articles touch on different aspects of power and leadership. Bolden, for instance, tackles the aspect of distributed leadership and further notes that leadership can be distributed, but power cannot. On the other hand, Krause opines that there are various bases of power and a leader uses his/her position to extract the required action from juniors to achieve a certain objective. Further, Lunenberg puts forward the scrutiny that power is interconnected to how one is able to put forth control. He argues that leadership and power are inextricable and vital towards attaining an indispensable outcome. Finally, Shuh et al. observe that leaders encompass different motivations in how much they want to put forth authority. Concisely, these articles suggest that all aspects of power and leadership should be studied in order to fully understand their definitions, the relationship between them, and how they differ.

**Index Terms** - Power, Leadership, Distribution, Base, Motivation, and Objective

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The description of distributed leadership puts the definitions of power and leadership into perspective. According to Bolden (2011, p.251), distributed leadership represents a type of leadership that shifts the focus of leadership from the individual to a process that is collective in nature. In distributed leadership, no individual imposes on another or others. Interestingly, Bolden further argues that leadership can be distributed but power is usually not distributed. The implication from this observation is that power is an attribute usually held by individuals while leadership can be either held by an individual or

distributed. In an organization, Bolden posits the view that a manager may invoke the concept of distributed leadership in order to seek cooperation from employees (Bolden, 2011, p.260).

Building on Bolden's (2011) argument, the concept of leadership and power can further be examined through the lens of actions of leaders. For instance, a leader may bankrupt a company, or an educational leader may encourage cheating in exams. A leader may also abscond from duty for selfish purposes. According to Ciulla & Forsyth (2011, p.229), these actions do not call into question the

effectiveness of leadership, but whether the behaviors are ethical. Ciulla & Forsyth argue that humans who acquire positions of leadership will often behave in unexpected ways (p.229). To the extent that the argument can be made that some leaders misuse their positions, it can similarly thus be proposed that they use the power bestowed on them inappropriately. Thus, power in that sense flows from leadership.

According to Krause (2011), there are various bases of power (p.216). For example, coercive and reward power are powers derived from leadership, while other forms of activities can be described as those influenced by leadership. These include activities by leaders that enhance performance, ensuring equity among employees, or actions by leaders targeted at disseminating expert knowledge (Krause, 2011, p.216). In power-based leadership, a leader uses his/her position to extract the required action from juniors through

intimidation, salary cuts, and other forms of punishment. In effect, the leader applies coercive power to achieve a certain objective (Krause, 2011, p.216).

Lunenberg (2012, p.1) posits the view that power is related to how one is able to exert influence. Leaders derive power either from the organization or from themselves. When it is from the organization, it is coercive, rewarding, or legitimate power. If it is personal it is either referent or expert. Lunenberg points out that though coercive power, for instance, is related to unfavorable organizational outcomes, leaders will usually seek to synthesize various forms of power depending on what they are confronted with. In essence, Lunenberg argues that leadership and power are inextricable, the latter vital in order to get necessary results.

Shuh et al. (2014, p.364) further observe that leaders have different motivations in how much they want to exert

influence. Leaders who have high power motivation will often seek positions where they can have authority and impact. Shuh et al. point out that motivation for power is also linked to how much individuals will invest to attain leadership (p.366). Such individual will often look for avenues to gain necessary qualifications and skills to become leaders. These opportunities include leadership seminars, and communicating with other leaders as a means to seek out positive role models in leadership. In the organization setting, individuals with high power motivation will take advantage of any developmental avenue that will enhance their leadership skills.

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