

Making the most of your power

'Power can corrupt, but absolute power is absolutely delightful.'
Anon.

One of the most interesting and crucial elements involved in a negotiation is the balance of power between the various interests involved. If the two or more parties have different amounts of power and know it, there is already some inequality involved – they are not starting from the same place – it's not fair!

When I run seminars on negotiating skills, one of the questions I ask the group is, 'What are the issues which influence the outcome of any negotiation?' One of the answers which always comes near the top of the list is POWER. Power is important in negotiations because:

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- 1 People believe that it is important.
- 2 It can affect the ability of the negotiators to make decisions.
- 3 It can affect the outcome of the negotiation – the person with more power, perceived or actual, is likely to achieve more of what he wants.
- 4 It can affect whether a negotiation continues – the person with a lot of power can choose to impose her solution.

In organisations, people are overtly aware of power. It is something which has a bearing on their everyday behaviour, it influences who they talk to and deal with on a day-to-day basis. It may not be something which is talked about or referred to directly, but you know that if you are dealing with the Managing Director or Chairman of the Board, there may be differences in the way you approach them and the way you would approach a colleague at the same level, or a subordinate, with the same suggestion or request.

Outside of organisations too, power can be tangible at times. If you build an extension on your house, the building inspector has the power to come and inspect your property and tell you to put some more insulation here, or an extractor fan in the bathroom there. Officials in various government or local council offices have the infuriating power to block your request or withhold information which would be just what you needed if you only knew the right questions to ask. The police can signal you to pull over as you drive innocently along the road, and can ask you questions about where you have been or what you have been doing.

AWARENESS OF POWER

Power is something which we tend to think about in terms of how much power other people have. We tend to be much more aware of other people's power than our own. The awareness of power also depends to a certain extent on what you want. If you are a freelance consultant working for a management college, the power which various lecturers or directors have is of very little concern to you until they show some interest in employing you, or you want to influence them to employ you in some way.

The effects of the environment

In an environment where the norm is power based on status, usually used to coerce or reward, expertise is unlikely to have much influence. In environments where cooperation is the norm on which power is based, expertise, information and personal power are more valued. It used to be the case that in hospitals, the expert power of consultants was far more valued than the administrative power of the hospital administrators.

The effects of the situation

When you are trying to influence someone, such as when you are negotiating with them, you need to think about the relevance of your source of power. Power has to relate to the situation. The former Director of Public Prosecutions (D.P.P.), Sir Michael Green, had the power to make decisions about cases involving police and the courts at the very highest level. Yet when he was caught kerb crawling in a St Pancras street, the power he had as D.P.P. was of no use to him. The constable in the patrol car had more power *in that situation*.

Departmental and Regional managers have a lot more power than the secretaries or other clerical workers within the same organisation, but if one of them wants an appointment with the Chief Executive, his secretary will have a great deal of power to make that appointment or fail to find time in the diary. *In that situation* the secretary has more power than they do.

The management of a factory has power to hire and fire workers. If the workers decide to call a strike, they have a certain amount of power over the management, as loss of production means loss of profit. Individually, they have little power. In the situation where they join together to form a large group, they increase their power effectively enough to match or outweigh the power of management.

The effects of perception

'If you would be powerful, pretend to be powerful.'

Horne Tooke, 1736–1812

Remember that the amount of power you have will depend on the people on the receiving end of it and their perceptions of your power. It will also depend on the particular context in which you are operating. Power is only effective if people believe that you have it. It is *perceived* power rather than *actual* power which counts. Now in many cases, perceived and actual power do match up, but in cases where they don't, perceived power is usually more important.

It's not only how other people perceive your power that makes the difference – how you perceive it is of major significance. If you believe that your power is inferior to that of the person with whom you are negotiating, you are immediately putting yourself at a disadvantage. It is not uncommon to hear people say, 'He's holding all the cards', or 'She's got the advantage of me here'. Sometimes when you start thinking like this you can go on to convince yourself that you have no power at all in this situation.

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Sources of power

Power comes from a number of sources, some of them external – those which other people or society gives us, and others of them internal – power which we give ourselves or allow ourselves to have. Let us have a look at some of these sources of power before doing a self-assessment of how much power you may have in different situations.

EXTERNAL POWER

External Power is the sort of power which comes from outside ourselves. French and Raven identified five different sources of power in 'The Bases of Social Power', 1959.

Legitimate power

This is the sort of power which comes from having a recognised position or authority. It is sometimes called Position Power. Legitimate power comes from being the manager of a department or section, and having authority to make certain decisions and take certain actions. It is the power a policeman has to ask to see your driving licence, the power of a bus conductor to ask you to leave the bus if you don't have the money to pay the fare.

It is power because people recognise the position you have as a

legitimate one, and therefore recognise your right to do certain things. Legitimate power is limited to the areas where it is recognised as valid; for example, you may be a holy terror to the people who work for you, but step outside your area of authority and your power may well be non-existent.

Reward power

If you are able to give something to someone that they want, or withhold something they want, you have reward power. Every time a parent bribes a child they are using their reward power, every time a manager promotes a member of staff, a foreman allows someone to knock off early, or a rich nation sends aid to a poor nation. Having reward power means that you are able to give or withhold something that the recipient wants or expects. Reward power can be very effective and very useful; it can also backfire if used without careful thought.

Reward power needs to be relevant to the recipient. If your power to reward means that you are able to offer something which perhaps was of value in the past but is now readily available, or something which is valuable to most people but not to the person concerned, then it is useless. If a teacher has a large store of dinosaur stickers and gives them as a reward for good work, her reward power will be severely reduced when dinosaurs fall from favour and footballers, pop stars, or twenty-seven different types of roller skate become the latest rage.

Coercive power

If reward power is a parent bribing a child with a bar of chocolate, coercive power is the child threatening to scream all the way around the supermarket *unless* they are given a bar of chocolate. Having coercive power means being able to make threats about what will happen if your wishes/demands/wants are not met, *and having those threats believed*. The person on the end of the threat knows that you have something unpleasant up your sleeve which you will not hesitate to use if provoked. Again, the crucial element to coercive power is that whoever you are threatening *believes* that you have the means to carry out the threat you have just made.

Often, Reward power and Coercive power go hand in hand, though not always. Management have reward power, unions have coercive power. Parents have both reward and coercive power – as do children.

Anne Jackson is a working mother who regularly on a Friday night picks up her young daughter from the childminder and stops off at the supermarket on the way home. Five o'clock on a Friday is a busy time at the supermarket, it is crowded and the only safe place for a two-year-old child is in the seat of the

trolley. Lucy doesn't like sitting in the trolley, she likes to help. Anne is usually tired by the end of the week, and her daughter is tired by the end of the day. The child is always a little grumpy when her mother first collects her: Anne often thinks that it is as if the child is trying to punish her for not being with her all day.

On one occasion, when Lucy was grizzling, Anne gave her a packet of Smarties to keep her quiet while she got the groceries in relative peace. The next time they went to the supermarket, Lucy wanted Smarties again. Anne refused, saying that she could have some after she had had her tea. At this, Lucy staged a full blown tantrum, which even those of you who are privileged not to have been on the receiving end of, have probably witnessed. Half-way round, Anne could stand it no longer and handed out the Smarties.

Smarties are now a regular feature of the Friday night shopping trip at the supermarket. They are no longer an example of Anne's reward power, but of Lucy's coercive power.

The same story could be repeated many times in hundreds of different guises – a reward which becomes seen as a right, with coercive power applied if it is not carried out.

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The management of a biscuit factory unofficially allowed night shift workers to finish early when production targets were reached. Over time, workers ensured that production targets were always reached in time to allow them to finish about an hour before the shift officially ended. When a new night shift manager attempted to introduce higher production targets thus threatening the early finish, the workers threatened to strike.

Expert power

This is perhaps the most acceptable kind of power. Expert power is perceived as having been worked for: you only get expertise if you have experience or knowledge. It is the kind of power which is most likely to feel comfortable both to those who have the power and those who experience its use. Anyone who knows a lot more about a subject than all those around her has expert power. People are willing to accept it as valid. The amount of expert power you have depends on the people you are working with: an archaeologist among other archaeologists will have less expert power than an archaeologist consulted by a group of lay people. Expert power can also be intimidating; in the case of someone who has a lot of technical knowledge advising someone who does not.

You take your car to the garage for a service and the receptionist rings you mid-morning to say that there is something technical and complicated wrong with it which needs to be put right. She probably names the thing that is wrong

with the engine, but your mind immediately edits out that information because it doesn't understand it. You need your car in order to make an important journey tomorrow. What do you do?

In this sort of situation, you are likely to feel powerless and helpless. You may feel that you have very little choice but to tell the garage to do the repairs, probably landing you with a much larger bill than you had bargained for. The expertise of the garage mechanic is more than a match for your power as a customer wielding the money, although it might be thought that in a situation where one has money to buy and the other has service to offer, the power lies with the buyer.

Referent or charismatic power

Some people have power just because of the sort of person they are. You may know someone at your place of work, or socially, who seems to be able to pull people along with her with very little effort. Usually they have something about them which other people admire or want to emulate. The middle aged of any generation are usually puzzled and amazed by the sort of power and influence which unkempt and badly dressed pop stars have over the young. Pop stars sometimes go on from having referent power to having position power – their record at the top of the charts, or reward power – the ability to give favours to fans.

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Other kinds of power not identified by French and Raven but readily recognisable inside and outside of work are:

Connection power

This sort of power is to do with who you know, what influence you might be able to have in circles which matter. If you are friendly with or related to someone with power and influence, the people around you may believe you to have connection power; that you have the ear of the MD or the Chairman of the Board. Connection power has often been a way in which children followed their parents into the same profession – a well-thought-of worker has a word in the ear of the foreman, or a barrister puts in a good word for the son of a former schoolfriend.

Information power

The person who is perceived by others as having information which nobody else has, has information power. Often, people with legitimate power have information power, but it is also a form of power which can be held by those who have no formal power at all within an organisation. The managing director's secretary, who knows her whereabouts and the

state of her diary, the messenger who always knows the latest gossip on what is going on in the boardroom. That person in your organisation who always seems to know before anyone else what is going on.

Of course information power has a more serious side. It belongs to those who know exactly how many people need to be made redundant, where and when. It belongs to those who know when critical changes in the organisation are to be made, and who is likely to be most affected by them. Once more, you don't actually need to have the information all of the time – you just need other people to believe that you have it.

Physical power

This is arguably the most basic sort of power – and perhaps the most obvious. It is used by countries to make war or threats of war, by individuals or gangs of thugs and hooligans terrorising neighbourhoods or the elderly, by parents over their small children. It is a very effective and can be a very intimidating kind of power. It is often, but not exclusively, used coercively. It can be used beneficially – for example a parent restraining a child from running on to the road, or a strong person assisting someone weaker to achieve an objective.

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Negative power

Negative power is the power to stop things happening, to disrupt, to delay things. It is often used coercively, but can also be used in a passive way. When Gandhi started his Civil Disobedience campaign in 1930, to try to gain Independence from the British, he and the Indian peasants he led had no apparent power. Gandhi did not incite his followers to an uprising against the British. He asked them instead to disrupt the power of the Empire by negative means – sitting on railway lines to disrupt communications, refusing to cooperate with the Establishment.

Negative power is usually latent. It isn't apparent until someone begins to use it. For example, the person who opens and sorts the mail for an office has very little power. However, if there comes a day when she feels aggrieved for some reason and hides or wrongly distributes the mail, her negative power may have repercussions for the whole office.

A bus driver has very little overt power. Her negative power could be expressed by driving past a group at a bus stop on a rainy night because she was behind with her schedule, or because she had had a row with her boss or her partner perhaps.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EXTERNAL POWER

- 1 Identify it by using the questionnaire at the end of the chapter.
- 2 Heighten your awareness of it. Admit to yourself that you have this sort of power.

- 3 Think about how you could use it to best advantage, how can you demonstrate that you know you possess that type of power.
- 4 Make sure that the other people in the situation know that you have the power.
- 5 Demonstrate your ability and willingness to use it, perhaps by reference to times you have done so in the past.

INTERNAL OR PERSONAL POWER

When we think about power, we tend to think about external power, the power of position, strength, rewards, punishments, expertise. One source of power we think far less about is our own internal power, the power we have inside ourselves.

The amount of internal power we have depends to a large extent on how powerful we *allow* ourselves to be. There are other labels for internal power, such as confidence, self-esteem, self-reliance. It can also come over as determination, conviction or a sense of purpose. Whatever the label for it, the amount of internal power you have will have an impact on the amount of power you are *seen* as having by others.

HOW WE LIMIT OUR OWN POWER

Many people limit their own power. They do it in two ways:

- (a) By downgrading in their own eyes the amount of power they have.
- (b) By effectively giving power away to other people by being more willing to legitimise and recognise power that other people have.

The interesting thing about power, is that it doesn't have to be used. The fact that people believe that someone has it is enough. While this can work in your favour if other people believe that you have power, it can also be a limiting factor on your power if you believe that other people have more than you. Even if others do have more power than you do, there is a tendency to credit them with more power than they actually have.

The chief executive of a software company has plenty of legitimate power. However, she has more power within the organisation than her position alone warrants. Because she is well aware of her own power, other people behave towards her in a way which legitimises and reinforces her power and diminishes their own.

Power and beliefs

The sort of beliefs we have about our own power and the power of other people can have a huge impact on how powerful we are.

Fiona and Alison both work for the same boss. During the course of one month, a particularly busy period in that department, both Fiona and Alison needed to take two days off, for personal reasons. When Fiona went to her manager, she had little expectation that she would be able to have the time she needed. She knew that he had the power to make this decision and she felt that she was in a very poor position to ask for the time, as it was a busy period, she felt embarrassed and awkward about asking. When Alison went, she was also aware of the manager's power to make the decision. However, she was also aware of her own worth as a valuable member of staff and was confident of her ability to convince her boss that she could make up the work when she returned.

Neither of these women had a better reason than the other to be given the leave. Both were equally vital to the efficient functioning of the department. The fact that the manager refused the leave to Fiona and granted it to Alison, may have been based on a number of causes, but was certainly to a large extent the consequence of how powerful each woman had felt in that situation.

For some people the thought of negotiating engenders feelings of nervousness, or inadequacy or a general loss of confidence in their ability to do this part of their job excellently. It's not only at work that the thought of negotiating engenders these feelings. If person A knows that she has to come to an agreement with person B, about a subject to which they do not have a common approach, and that the subject is important enough for them to discuss it formally, person A may well feel nervous or lack confidence about her ability. Feelings can range through nervousness, anxiety, inadequacy, fear of failure, and a general lack of confidence. This is not something that they enjoy doing nor feel that they have any expertise to conduct.

FEELING MORE CONFIDENT – THE POWER OF BELIEFS

Where do these feelings come from? Why is it that in some situations we feel inadequate, we fear failure, we are sure that other people will be able to perform better than we can? Feelings spring from our beliefs about ourselves. Imagine your own power, confidence and ability to influence, as a bucketful of feelings. At the top of the bucket is a layer of self-confidence – the internal power you can use to increase your ability to influence. Below that is a layer of self-esteem, how positively you perceive yourself and your ability to deal with problems. Below that are the beliefs you have about yourself which have been built up and reinforced from childhood, through school and working life. Beliefs which have been engendered by other people's reactions to you, by the attitude of parents, peers, teachers, supervisors and by your own successes and failures.

Your beliefs about yourself affect your behaviour, which influences



Fig. 4.1 The bucket of beliefs

other people's perception of you. This affects their behaviour towards you, which reinforces your belief about yourself. Figure 4.2 illustrates the situation as a circle of beliefs.

INCREASING YOUR PERSONAL POWER

There are ways in which you can increase your personal power:

- be aware of your power
- harness your inner voice
- think about the positive not the negative outcome
- remember they may need something from you.

Be aware of your power

Recognise and acknowledge the external power you have in each situation. There will be very few situations where you are absolutely powerless. Focus on successes you have had in the past, in similar

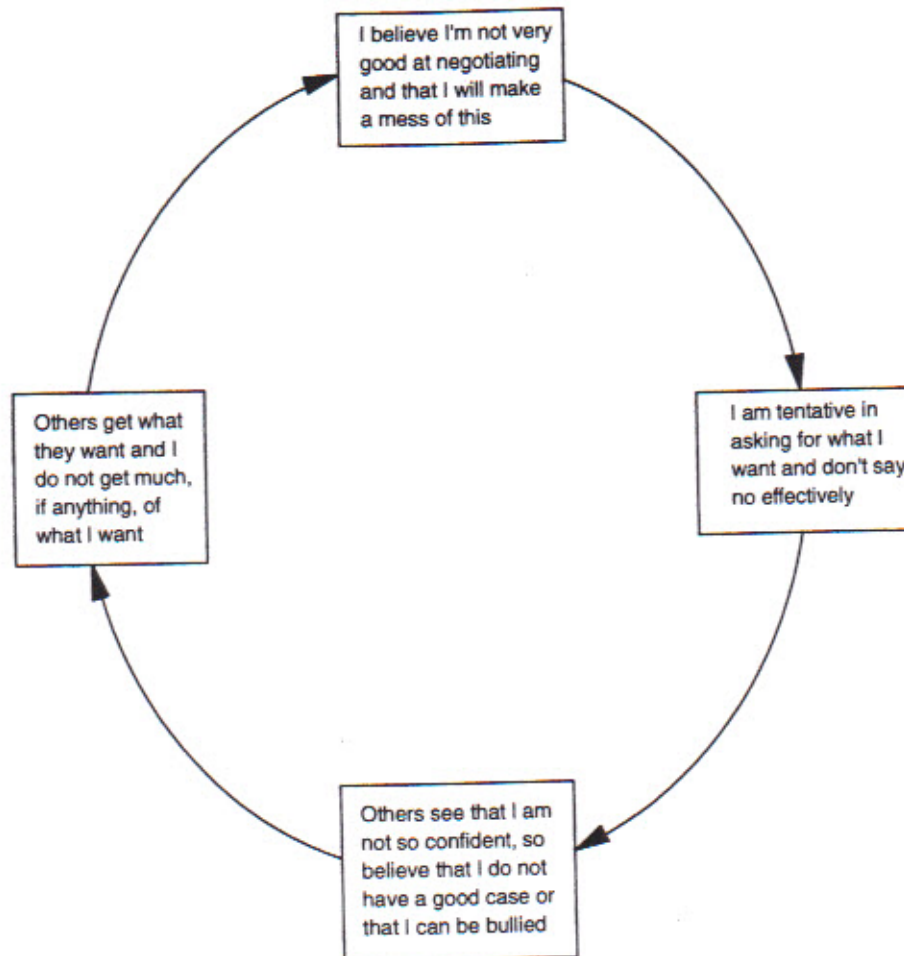


Fig. 4.2 The circle of beliefs

situations. It is easy to remember the times you messed things up – put those to the back of your mind and dredge to the surface the times you were successful and competent. You don't need to be modest, you are only reminding *yourself* about how good you are.

Be aware of what you have to offer. Do you have some skill, some knowledge, something which can add value to the problem, negotiation, or decision-making process?

Harness your inner voice

I expect you are familiar with your own inner voice – the one that says, 'You made a real mess of that; what were you expecting anyway, trying

to take on something you should never have attempted in the first place?' We all have an inner voice. Sometimes it encourages us to go on and do something different, or congratulates us when we achieve something. More often it is a negative voice, pointing out all our faults and failings mercilessly, but failing to do the same for successes and achievements.

We all need a warning voice to ensure that we don't become overconfident, or do dangerous things, but if your warning voice becomes a discouraging, negative voice, check the reality of what it is saying. Negative voices often talk in absolutes: you always mess it up, you never act confidently, everyone will be criticising, you'll get it all wrong. A reality check allows you to put a rein on your inner voice and change the absolute into shades of grey. Do you really *always* mess it up?

You can turn your inner voice into an asset which will help you to feel less nervous and make your outcome more positive. Think of your inner voice as a supporter, cheering you on. Let it say something along these lines to you: 'You're going to make a success of this. You really know more about this than anyone else. You are the expert. You have a lot of experience in this subject. You are perfectly capable of negotiating with this person. You have done your preparation thoroughly and know you can cope. You've done far more difficult things than this in your life before. This may not be easy but you can do it well.'

Think about the positive, not negative outcome

Most people have had an experience about which they felt nervous. Having to give a vote of thanks to a speaker or make a presentation yourself, asking someone more senior than yourself to do something for you, presenting a report to a meeting. All these and many others are the sort of occasion which start the butterflies moving.

Before the event, it's all too easy to imagine what can go wrong. Sometimes our inner voice has a field day on these occasions: 'What if my voice dries up or I have a coughing fit. I'll probably forget what I want to say or I might drop my notes. What if my mind goes completely blank? Perhaps I'll get my words mixed up like that vicar who said Brides and Gownies instead of Guides and Brownies and everyone will laugh at me. I'm sure to go bright red and everyone will know that I'm nervous/embarrassed. I'm sure they will have a better case than I will. They've got far more experience than I have.' . . . and so on.

The problem with being only too well aware of what can go wrong, is that it can begin to drain your confidence. You may feel less sure that you have all the facts at your fingertips and begin to doubt your own ability to carry out the presentation or carry off the negotiations.

Think positive. Think 'I can do this. I have prepared, I have all the knowledge I need, there is every reason why I can look forward to a

successful outcome. It will go well . . . ' and so on in that vein. It may sound implausible, but it works.

Remember they may need something from you

When you are negotiating, however powerful and strong the other party seems to be, remember that they would not be negotiating with you unless they wanted something from you. It may be money, time, knowledge, skill, or even more nebulous concepts such as cooperation, goodwill, or lack of opposition. Whatever it is, when you are negotiating, *you have some power*. If you have not identified what that power is or where it comes from, do so, because that is one way of increasing it.

Power is part of any negotiation. You can increase your chances of using the power you have at your disposal by acknowledging and being prepared to use your external power and by taking a good look at your beliefs and how they affect your behaviour and your internal power. Use the following questionnaire to identify your external power and increase your internal power.

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Look at the situation

Remembering that power is relative to the *situation* you are in, and the people you are with, *apply these questions to each situation*, rather than using them as a blanket test. The questions are based in organisations, but can be applied to other groups.

- 1 Are you an expert on the subject?
- 2 Are you representing someone, or do you have an official position?
- 3 Do you have any inside knowledge?
- 4 Do you know anyone who might be able to influence the outcome?
- 5 Do you have the sort of personality which can charm ?
- 6 Can you apply any sanctions or other pressure?

IDENTIFY YOUR EXTERNAL SOURCES OF POWER

Legitimate or Position Power

- 1 Do you have formal and recognised authority in your role? (e.g., authority stated in your job description).
- 2 Do you have to give your approval before others can take action?
- 3 Do you have the formal right to take decisions?
- 4 Do you supervise other people?

Reward Power

- 1 Do you have control over valued resources in your organisation?
 - (a) money?
 - (b) promotion?
 - (c) access to senior managers?
 - (d) times of work?
 - (e) holidays?
 - (f) training opportunities and budgets?
 - (g) expenses?
 - (h) other perks of the job?
- 2 Are you able to reward people with praise for a job well done?

Coercive Power

- 1 Are you able to use your control over any of the resources mentioned for Reward Power as a sanction or punishment?
- 2 Does your position allow you to criticise or blame without challenge?

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Expert Power

- 1 Do you have knowledge of a specialised subject or aspect of work?
- 2 Does it take a long time to learn to do your job?
- 3 Do you need a qualification to be able to practise your skill or knowledge?
- 4 Is someone with your skills and knowledge unusual in the organisation?
- 5 Is your specialised subject valued within the organisation?
- 6 How often are you consulted about your specialised area of skill?
- 7 Do more senior people consult you about your particular area of expertise?

Charismatic Power

- 1 Do people of the same status as you seem to do what you ask them to without you having to use too much pressure?
- 2 Do people seek you out for a social chat or for advice?
- 3 Do your subordinates do things for you cheerfully and willingly?
- 4 Are you popular?

Connection Power

- 1 Are you friendly with anyone who is perceived as powerful?

THINKING ON YOUR FEET IN NEGOTIATIONS

- 2 Do you know people who might use their influence on your behalf?

Information Power

- 1 Do you have access to valuable information before most other people in the organisation?
- 2 Do you have a network of people who keep you informed about what is going on?
- 3 Do you have specific information about potential changes or initiatives before other people?
- 4 Do others seek you out to find out the latest news or gossip?

Physical Power

- 1 Are you physically stronger than those around you?
- 2 Are you asked to help with physical tasks?

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Negative Power

- 1 Do your actions have the capacity to make life uncomfortable for a particular group?
- 2 Can your lack of action have the capacity to make life uncomfortable for a particular group?
- 3 Can your behaviour disrupt life enough to make others want to negotiate with you?
- 4 Do you have the motivation and nerve to carry out disruptive or passive negative action?
- 5 Are you prepared to threaten to do so?

For each of the sections above, the more you answered 'Yes', the more of that type of power you have. You will probably find that in some situations, you may have legitimate power, whereas in others you have expert power or reward power. In a number of instances you may have more than one type of power.

INCREASE YOUR INTERNAL POWER

- 1 What beliefs do you have about yourself that are limiting your internal power?
- 2 What evidence can you find that these beliefs are not true?
- 3 Have you checked the reality of any negative messages you are giving yourself?
- 4 How can you turn your inner voice from a critic into a champion?