ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR THAT CHARACTERIZE A POWER PLAY IN A SMALL GROUP

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ABSTRACT

Power Play is defined as "an attempt by a person, group or organization to use power in a forceful and direct way to get or do something" (Merriam-Webster, 2015). This study involved the design of a research proposal to investigate "power play" in small groups. The literature review established a paucity of research studies in the acquisition and use of power in groups. Additionally, the review showed a scarcity of qualitative studies that provide greater understanding to scholars and practitioners of group member need, acquisition and use of power in small groups. A qualitative study using the socio-rhetorical criticism is proposed to investigate "power play" among three leaders as recorded in Numbers 12. Specifically, the socio-rhetorical analysis of Numbers 12 will inform the conclusions of the investigation and reveal nuances of attitudes and behavior that precede and characterize a power play in a small group. The study will also suggest ways power plays may be resolved in leadership teams.

Keywords: Groups, Power, Power Play, Inner Texture Analysis, Socio-Rhetorical Criticism.

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Studies have recommended flatter organizational structures and more cross-functional teams as the best strategy for successful organizations but leading less-hierarchical systems and virtual workgroups requires more influence and power (Pfeffer, 2010). More than ever, scholars and leaders need to understand the role of power in effective leadership to cope with an ever-changing global economy.

Moreover, organizations provide an opportunity for individuals to develop their careers through the acquisition of power as the means for transforming individual interests into activities which consequentially impact other people (Zaleznik, 1970). Group members have varying levels of expectations and need for affiliation, achievement, power and resources (Arrow et al., 2000). Members of a group need a functional level of agreement (explicitly or implicitly) on, (a) how membership status is determined, (b) the acceptable degree of power disparity and (c) the rules and norms governing the use of power (Arrow et al., 2000). Without explicit or implicit agreement on pertinent issues, conflict and "power plays" may ensue among members of that group. For the purpose of this study, "Power Play" is defined as "an attempt by a person, group or organization to use power in a forceful and direct way to get or do something" (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

A review of the extant literature reveals that some of the dynamics of organizational behavior such as conflict, stress and commitment have received a fair amount of attention, but power has relatively been neglected by researchers (Luthans, 2010). Northouse (2015) posits that though power is clearly a vital component of the leadership process, research on its role in leadership is scarce. The emphasis on flat organizational structures and the resultant prominence

of follower empowerment have relegated research on power to a lower level in empirical studies (Yi, Jia&Changkun, 2014). Specifically, Arrow et al. (2000) report that only limited research has illuminated how members and activity in a group fulfill or fail to fulfill member needs for power. Understanding the dynamics of power is critical to the understanding of group and organizational behavior, particularly leadership effectiveness (Yi, Jia & Changkun, 2014).

The goal of this study is to use an exegetical study in Numbers 12 to investigate and understand power play as exhibited between three siblings in a leadership team. The study will reveal nuances of attitudes and behavior that precede and characterize a power play in a small group. The study will also suggest ways power plays may be prevented and resolved in leadership teams.

GROUPS

From the beginning of time, isolation and solitary life are not the standard behavior for human beings. The Bible records, "It is not good that the man should be alone..." (Genesis, KJV). The propensity for humans to gravitate towards each other in groups is a normal social behavior that deserves understanding and critical study. It is widely known that some of the most important events in one's life take place in groups or community. Forsyth (2014) posits that the comprehensive understanding of people requires the understanding of their groups. In this section of the paper, we will discuss the definition of a group, the types of groups, group interdependence, group member needs and their goals.

Definition of a Group

According to Forsyth (2014), the definition of a group depends on the foci of attention by the different researchers or theorists. Various scholars emphasize different features or foci of group activity in their descriptions and analysis of groups. Below in Table 1 is a sample of some of the definitions suggested by several scholars:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">Table 1
A SAMPLE OF DEFINITIONS OF THE WORD GROUP</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">Foci of Attention</td><td align="center">Definition</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">Purpose</td><td>"To put it simply they are units composed of two or more persons who come into contact for a purpose and who consider the contact meaningful"(Mills, 1967)</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">Common Goal</td><td>"Two or more individuals interacting with each other to accomplish a common goal" (Ivancevich et al., 2014)</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">Relationships</td><td>"A group is defined by the existence of continuing face-to-face relationships between its members" (Smith, 1973)</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">Communication</td><td>"…defined as three or more people…with the upper limit based on members' ability to be aware of the individuality of every other group member) who (a) think of themselves as a group, (b) are interdependent… and (c) communicate (interact) with one another (Frey & Konieczka, 2010)</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">Size</td><td align="center">"Two or more people." (Hogg & Cooper, 2003)</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">Interdependence</td><td>"A group is a "dynamic whole based on interdependence rather than similarity." (Lewin, 1948)</td></tr>
</table>

Notwithstanding, this study will adopt the definition presented by Forsyth (2006) that states a group is defined as "two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships." The definition presented by Forsyth (2006) is appropriate because it combines three critical essentials, namely, the number of individuals involved in the group, the links or network of associations in the group and the relationship(s) in the group (Smith, 2015). Benson (2001) identified six attributes that a majority of scholars agreed upon as essential features of a group and he reduced them to three:

1. There are parts.
2. There is relationship between the parts.
3. There is an organizing principle.

Groups are organic, natural and are defined by others as a group and exist in relation to other groups (Benson, 2001).

Types of Groups

Although there are many ways of categorizing groups, two types of categories have persisted and maintained their utility; (a) primary and secondary groups and (b) planned and emergent groups (Smith, 2015). In this study we will employ the second categorization of groups, that is, groups are planned and groups are emergent. According to Arrow et al. (2000) planned groups are formed intentionally either by the members or by an outside individual, group or organization and emergent groups are relatively spontaneous in their formation. As reported by Arrow et al., the combination of external and internal forces, planned assembly and emergent processes, acting concurrently, originate and shape all groups in their formation resulting in four categories of groups:

1. Concocted groups characterized by external and planned forces dominance.
2. Founded groups characterized by internal and planned forces dominance.
3. Self-organized groups characterized by internal and emergent forces dominance.
4. Circumstantial groups characterized by external and emergent forces dominance.

Group Interdependence

Baron & Kerr (2003) posit that group members' outcomes frequently are contingent on the actions of others in the group. Others in the group greatly influence the experiences, emotions, activities and behaviors of one member (Smith, 2005). Baron & Kerr (2003) have contended that group members' outcomes usually depend on the actions of others in the group. Additionally, the sharing of common outcomes based on group membership is referred to as common fate by some scholars (Brewer & Kramer, 1986).

Member Needs, Goals and Conflict

Member needs include the need for affiliation, achievement, power and resources; what is more, these needs constitute the engine of local dynamics such as conflict or power play among members (Arrow et al., 2000). According to Arrow et al. (2000), the local dynamics of a group are driven by, (a) individual efforts to achieve personal goals and (b) by individual and joint efforts to achieve collective goals. Ivancevich, Konopaske & Matteson (2014) postulate that there are three primary causes of intergroup conflict, (a) interdependence, (b) goal differences

and (c) perceptual differences and they also caution that conflict and conflict resolution vary across cultures.

POWER

Power is the capability of a person to alter and manage the behavior, attitude, beliefs and actions of others (Faiz, 2013). Nelson & Quick (2012) defined power as the capacity to influence and control another individual. According to Pfeffer (2010), whoever has control over valuable resources like information can build a power base. A study by McClelland & Burnham (2003) found that leaders who are motivated by a desire to acquire and wield power were more effective than leaders who were interested in being esteemed by subordinates or merely driven by a desire for personal achievement.

Consequently, power is a resource and an effective tool in the hands of whoever possesses and controls it (Faiz, 2013). It is expected that disagreements are bound to occur when members of a group pursue their personal quests for power within the group (Arrow et al., 2000). Furthermore, the type of power available to members varies among groups and within groups depending on, (a) role assignments, (b) member attributes and (c) constraints on power disparity between members allowed by the group (Arrow et al., 2000). In this segment of the article, we will discuss power and leadership, bases of power and power play within groups.

Power and Leadership

According to Northouse (2015), the concept of power is related to leadership because power plays a role in the leadership process. To lead an organization or group in the desired direction, the leader needs to develop the ability to acquire, build and wield influence or power over the followers (Pfeffer, 2010). On the other hand, other scholars claim that power involves some level of an imposition of one's' will on the will of another through some form of rewards or punishment (Lee, 2014). Lee (2014) postulates that the use of power by an individual undermines the claim that they are leading; they are, in actuality, managing (not leading) a group. Therefore, according to Lee, power and leading are incompatible concepts. An authentic leader, instead of centralizing power in him intentionally empowers others to lead (Lopez, 2014). Northouse (2015) posits that leaders are often described as wielders of power with the capacity to dominate others. In these instances, power is viewed as a tool, in contrast to the emphasis of others that conceptualize power from a relationship standpoint (Burns, 1978). In agreement with Burns, "power is a relationship among persons".

Kellerman (2012) argues that with the advent of modern technology that makes leaders more transparent, the empowerment of followers and the change in culture, followers now demand more from leaders. The status quo has changed; power is no longer synonymous with leadership as followers employ information power to level the playing field. In essence, leaders wield less power and in contrast, followers have more power (Kellerman, 2012).

Bases of Power

A question may be asked, where does power originate in a leaders' life? French & Raven (1959) proposed five sources of power within organizations: legitimate, reward, coercive, expert and referent. Raven (2008) went on to identify the sixth source of power called information power. According to Lunenburg (2012) the sources of power are used together in varying combinations depending on the situation and they are grouped into two categories, namely, organizational power (legitimate, reward, coercive) and personal power (expert and referent). Lunenburg's review of power sources revealed the following:

Legitimate Power

The ability to influence others' behavior because of ones' position within an organization is called legitimate power. Managers enhance that power through policies, procedures and rules.

Reward Power

The capacity to direct others' behavior by providing them with desirable rewards is called reward power. However, the followers must value the reward potentially offered by the one wielding power and there needs to be a distinct link between the performance and the reward. Interestingly, followers also have reward power through the use of 360-degree evaluations.

Coercive Power

A person's ability to affect others' behavior by punishing them or by presenting the threat to do so is called coercive power. Coercive power must be used sparingly because of the resultant negative effects, including anger and resentment against leaders who use it. Additionally, employees can also use coercive power through sarcasm and fear of rejection to ensure that group members conform to group norms.

Expert Power

The ability to shape others' behavior because of recognized knowledge, skills or abilities is referred to as expert power.
Interestingly, experts who are ranked low in the organizational chart may still wield power in the organization. As the knowledge economy grows in today's global market, expert power in organizations will increase.

Referent Power

A person's capacity to affect others' behavior because they like, admire and respect the individual is called referent power. Referent power grows out of admiration of another and a desire to be like that person.

Power Play

The power play in small groups is most common during decision-making processes and it is as much about followers as it is leaders (Jacob, 2007). Jacob (2007) argues that power play can

be used for individual gain or to help others. Zaleznik (1970) claims that organizations are political structures; they operate by distributing authority and power. It is no wondered that individuals are motivated to seek, secure and use power. Because power is a finite resource, individuals compete for power in an economy of scarcity resulting in a power play within groups and organizations. In other words, individuals in an organization cannot get all the power they want to advance their goals just by asking; instead they gain power at someone else's expense or gain it comparatively resulting in the relative shift in the distribution of power (Zaleznik, 1970). According to Zaleznik, organizations are not only inherently political, but they are often structurally pyramids with a scarcity of positions as one move higher in the pyramid. Pfeffer (2014) posits that power play is fundamentally the ability to have things your way when other's best efforts are required and when others have personal interests and ideas. Furthermore, Pfeffer (2014) specifically recommends that powerful people do several things to advance their agendas during a power play:

1. Mete out resources to garner support and allegiance.
2. Shape behavior through rewards and punishments.
3. Advance on multiple fronts.
4. Make the first move when a power struggle is looming.
5. Co-opt antagonists.
6. Remove rivals-nicely, if possible.
7. Don't draw unnecessary fire.
8. Use the personal touch.
9. Persist.
10. Make important relationships work-no matter what.
11. Make the vision compelling.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

A qualitative research method is recommended for this study. Specifically, the socio-rhetorical criticism, a multi-dimensional approach to textual analysis introduced by Robbins (1996a), will be used to collect, analyze and interpret the data. The metaphor of a thick tapestry will be used to explore the multiple textures of meanings, convictions, beliefs, values, emotions and actions as found in Numbers 12 (Robbins, 1996a).

Site, Population and Sample

The chosen sample is a leadership team selected from the sacred text (Numbers 12) and it is comprised of three leaders (Moses, Aaron & Miriam). These leaders were clearly chosen by God to lead the Nation of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land.

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage and I sent before you Moses, Aaron & Miriam. (Micah, New King James).

The three siblings constituted an effective leadership team that, for the most part, successfully dealt with grave crisis and numerous ordeals for about 40 years (Friedman, 2004). The leadership team as found in Numbers 12 clearly portrays the nuances of attitudes and behavior that precede and characterize a power play in a small group. The sample will also provide clues to how power plays may be resolved and prevented in leadership teams.

Choice of Methodology

According to Robbins (1996a), a text is a thick matrix of interwoven networks of meaning and meaning effects. Robbins (1996a) originally defined four textures: (1) Inner texture, (2) Intertexture, (3) Social and cultural texture and (4) Ideological texture. However, because of the scope of this study, only one method (Inner texture analysis) will be used in the investigation. The inner texture analysis focuses on numerous ways a text uses language to communicate (Robbins, 1996b). The method includes repetitive textures, progressive textures, narrational texture, opening-middle-closing textures, argumentative texture and sensory-aesthetic texture (Burkus, 1978). Each of the six textures will be separately analyzed and discussed as follows:

Repetitive Texture and Pattern

Certain words and phrases appear more than once in a text. The repetition of words and phrases produces a repetitive texture that may be portrayed in topics, pronouns, negatives and conjunctions (Robbins, 1996b). These patterns of repetition appear most distinctly when exhibited in some diagram. The repetitive texture of a Numbers 12 provides initial glimpses into rhetorical movements within the discourse.

Progressive Texture and Pattern

Words and phrases in a text appear in sequences or progressions. Progressive texture rises out of repetition and centers on the sequences of words and phrases throughout the text (Burkus, 1978).

Narrational Texture and Pattern

According to Burkus, the narrational texture analyzes the voice or voices through which the words of the text speak. Usually, the narrational texture reveals a pattern that prompts the discourse forward (Burkus, 1978).

Opening-Middle-Closing Texture and Pattern

The opening-middle-closing texture is found in the nature of the beginning, body and conclusion of a segment of discourse (Robbins, 1996b). According to Robbins (1996b), repetition, progression and narration regularly work together to create the first, middle and final units of text.

Argumentative Texture and Pattern

According to Robbins (1996b), the argumentative texture refers to the thinking a text uses to persuade its reader to a conclusion and the reasoning may either be logical or qualitative.

Sensory-Aesthetic Texture and Pattern

The sensory-aesthetic texture resides majorly in the interplay among senses, motor activities and subjective modes the text provokes or represents (Robbins, 1996). The sensory-aesthetic texture is constituted by three "body zones": emotion fused thought, self-expressive speech and purposeful action (Burkus, 1978).

Analysis of data

With socio-rhetorical criticism, the metaphor of texts as a thick tapestry replaces the traditional metaphor of texts as windows and mirrors (Robbins, 1996).According to Burkus, investigating each of the different textures provides intimate knowledge of words, word patterns, voices, structures, literary devices and modes in the text, which provide context for the meaning and meaning-effects knitted within the text.

LIMITATIONS

The full examination and most expansive interpretation of the text require the full use of the five textures of socio-rhetorical analysis, namely, inner texture, inter-texture, social-cultural texture, ideological texture and theological texture. However, the scope and time allocated for this project do not permit that course of action.

CONCLUSION

The socio-rhetorical analysis of Numbers 12 will inform the conclusions of the investigation and reveal nuances of attitudes and behavior that precede and characterize a power play in a small group. It will also suggest ways power plays may be resolved in leadership teams.

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