

Chapter 2

Have the Power, Do the Thing

*A manager's task is to elicit the necessary and sufficient actions from all those required to achieve a specific purpose. It is his **social power** which is a measure of his ability and capacity to mobilise actions from others. But it is his **exercise of power** which actually elicits actions. The **exercise of power** requires both direction and magnitude. Just the exercise of power and the generation of actions may not achieve his purpose. The actions could be misjudged or incorrect. The wrong actors may have been chosen. They may be incompetent or incapable. The actions may be unnecessary. Power can be dissipated if wrongly exercised. It is by the **proper exercise of power** that he can ensure that only those actions that are necessary are taken and that the actions taken are sufficient.*

The Ability to Mobilise Actions

One hears many glib slogans describing what power is:

- “Information is Power”
- “Knowledge is Power”
- “Intelligence is Power”
- “Money is Power”
- “Rank is Power”

But it would be just as easy to add that none of these – information or intelligence or knowledge or money or rank – would alone constitute power. And it would also be true to observe that all of these together do not necessarily represent or define power. Something else is needed for that.

In physics, energy is the capacity for doing work and power is the rate at which energy is expended in doing work, and work in turn can be expressed as a motive force exerted over a spatial distance. Social power as used in regard to human relations has some distinct similarities. The exercise of social power can be seen as the application of a motive force of social relationship, exerted between humans for the purpose of eliciting certain behaviours or actions. The human actions or behaviours that are summoned can be mapped to “work” in physics. In this analogy

the “exercise of power” between humans then becomes similar to “power” in physics. Social power in human relations then maps to “energy” in physics.

Some philosophers take human power to include not only control over others but also the individual’s influence over the surrounding environment. I restrict myself to considering the social power between people. This is sometimes categorised as being applied in only one of two ways; either through the use of physical force or through the force of persuasion. However a definition of power between people is elusive. What power is, and what the exercise of power is, has always been a fertile subject for philosophers ranging from Aristotle in ancient times through Thomas Hobbes and Friedrich Nietzsche to Michel Foucault and Steven Luke and Alvin Toffler in more modern times. There is still much debate which now extends to theories of “people power”, or for the “power plays” in ice hockey and in Games Theory and the interactions between nations.

In trying to take a practical view of complex philosophical and sociological concepts and apply them to the work-place, I find the approach of Michel Foucault, building on Niccolò Machiavelli, quite useful. They saw social power as being the strategic status of a person within a particular social situation which enabled him to influence and control and dominate others. I find that this is not so unlike my analogy from physics; where I take social power to be the state of an individual which can be applied to enable the mobilisation of actions. It can be taken to be similar to the state of energy of a material which enables, by its release, the doing of work.

Energy exists in materials in a variety of forms; it may be as potential energy or as kinetic energy or as thermal energy or as chemical energy or as nuclear energy. The form of energy is not unlike the different states of human condition that can exist such as respect or wealth or intelligence.

The most basic requirement of a manager – to be a manager – is that, as Edmund Burke put it, he “do the thing”, that he mobilise all the actions that are necessary and only those that are sufficient for the achievement of the objectives that he himself defines.

Edmund Burke

Do the thing and you will have the power. But they that do not the thing – had not the power.

I apply “necessary and sufficient” to actions in the sense of mathematics or logic. The actions then are those which are individually or jointly necessary and which are jointly sufficient. I include within the set of “actions”, all primary actions (directly or indirectly mobilised) together with all consequent reactions and any counter-actions.

In the particular context of managerial behaviour, I prefer a more precise and functional formulation:

- *Social **power** is the ability to mobilise actions.*
- *The **exercise of power** is the mobilisation of actions.*
- *The **proper exercise of power** is the mobilisation of the necessary and sufficient actions for a particular purpose.*

The principal states of human conditions which can lead to a force of social relationship and which in turn can mobilise actions include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Knowledge or skill or expertise
2. Authority earned by skill or knowledge or expertise
3. Force of personality or charisma
4. Physical superiority (or inferiority)
5. Physical force
6. Intelligence
7. Intellectual superiority (or inferiority)
8. Force of argument
9. Authority vested by an acknowledged superior authority
10. Fame and honours bestowed
11. Moral status
12. Age and its corresponding physical states (helplessness or strength or weakness)
13. Wisdom
14. Relationship
15. Social status
16. Wealth

Every individual has these states of human condition to some extent. If the states between two people are different then it is this difference which creates the potential difference of social power. A rich idiot may be powerless with an impoverished intellectual. A helpless infant may have incredibly potent power over an autocratic tycoon. Just as chemical energy or kinetic energy must be harnessed to do work, social power must also be harnessed to be able to mobilise actions. The social power of an individual to mobilise actions then consists of two parts. First, the difference of social power applicable is given by the result of all the appropriate and relevant states of human conditions that he can bring to bear in any particular interaction. Second, his inherent virtues of strength and courage and judgment and communication and integrity, must come into play so that the potential – the difference in states of human condition – is transformed into a motive force. In a manager or a prospective manager therefore, each of the three constituent parts which can lead to the “proper exercise of power” need to be considered separately:

1. Does he have or can he develop social power as the ability to mobilise actions?
2. Can he exercise or learn to exercise this power by which it is translated into actions?
3. Can he exercise the power properly by bringing about all those actions which are necessary but none beyond those which are sufficient for the achievement of his objectives?

Power

Let us take these three parts of our definition in turn.

Power » Exercise of Power » Proper Exercise of Power

First, consider the ability to mobilise actions.

With this particular formulation, “social power” is then a just a description of the potential or the capacity to mobilise actions. As such power is then merely a magnitude, a measure. In the language of physics or mathematics it is a Scalar quantity, though sometimes very difficult to quantify. It is useful here to refer again to analogies from the physical world. Managerial power is analogous to a high voltage potential or to a high water level or a high temperature level, which describe respectively the potentials for the flow of an electric current or the flow of water or the flow of heat. The existence of the potential is necessary but not sufficient to guarantee that a flow will occur. Something else is needed for that. Similarly the ability to mobilise action is not the action itself. Having power does not automatically result in actions. Something else is needed for that. But without the potential existing no flow can occur, and without power no actions can possibly be mobilised. Can this ability itself be described or measured? To address this we need to first look at human actions and the triggers which mobilise such actions.

I take it as an axiom that every voluntary human action is carried out only in response to a request.

The request can be self-generated for one’s own actions or it can come from others. Sometimes the request is implied rather than being expressed explicitly. The request can be in any form that can be sensed or detected by the subject. It may be visual, or aural or verbal or written or even unspoken and unexpressed. A smell of burning from the oven can trigger action from the chef; but even though the request to save the meal is not articulated, it is present, self-generated in the chef’s sub-conscious mind. A sound or a picture can trigger actions. A wave of the policeman’s hand is a visual cue which can trigger the subject’s movement in response to the policeman’s request. The request may be disguised. My observation about somebody else’s very neat appearance may be a disguised request to my son to get his hair cut. It may be a direct request or indirect. It may be a command or it may be a plea. It may be accompanied by threats of sanctions or the promise of inducements. It may contain the menaces of penalties or the offers of reward. It may call on the fulfilment of obligations or the repayment of debt. It may take the form of a duty demanded or a favour solicited. It may appear to be non-existent but is often present as an anticipated or a perceived request. But, the perception of the request lies only within the perception of the receiver. If the request is not perceived there is no request. Even where no explicit request is made the perception of a request within the receiver is sufficient for the request to exist.

The perceived request is a necessary condition for any voluntary human action. Wherever there is a voluntary action there is always a perceived request – always. But note that a request made is no guarantee of a request perceived. Furthermore,

the request perceived by a receiver – if perceived – may not be exactly as the maker of the request intended. Requests may even be perceived where no request is made or intended. (As Henry II probably claimed after his cry of “Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?” led to his knights perceiving a Royal request for the assassination of Thomas à Becket.)

It does not follow that a request – if and when perceived – will always lead to action. Without sufficient driving force backing up a request (power as we define it here), there will be no discernible action. The desire or motivation of the subject to respond to the perceived request, will determine the effectiveness with which the request is complied with or if it is complied with at all.

We can pursue our analogy from physics a little further. If the voltage or temperature difference is not high enough to overcome the internal resistance of an electric or thermal conductor no discernible current or heat will flow. A “weak” teacher will be ignored when demanding silence in class. Weak in this context could mean lacking sufficient difference in the relative states of the human condition to evoke a response. Weak may also mean a deficiency in an inherent virtue such as courage or strength or communication which can convert the difference of state into a motive force. A politician may not be able to fulfil his election promises even if he fully intended to. Paraphrasing Edmund Burke, “He does not the thing – for he had not the power”. To place an individual into the position of a manager where he may be vested with authority but where he has not the power, renders him ineffective and does a disservice to all.

Moreover, even if a request is perceived correctly, and is backed up with sufficient power, the action requested must be within the capabilities and the competence of the receiver. Else the action mobilised – even if performed with great enthusiasm – will not be the desired action. This probably explains why my wife’s commands to fix the washing machine are perfectly well understood and can generate frenetic activity on my part, but usually does not succeed in fixing anything!

If a chain of actions is what is needed and the primary subject is required to trigger further actions by others, then the subject’s own power to mobilise these further actions comes into play. This is the point where empowerment comes in. Empowerment is not merely the delegating of authority; it is increasing the ability of the receiver to mobilise actions and may include some delegation of authority. The manager can take suitable actions to increase one or other of the states of human condition which confer power on his subject (knowledge, skill, social status, wealth or authority for example), so as to enhance the subject’s capability for mobilising actions. But the manager needs to have the insight and judgment as to when empowerment of others is needed or beneficial to achieving his own objectives. Needless to say, he needs also the ability to be able to change one or more of the states of human condition in his subjects so as to empower them.

But the corollary for the good manager is that he does not empower others merely for the sake of empowerment. He does it for the sake of the actions he wishes to mobilise. Empowerment carries risk. Empowering the incompetent is a cardinal sin for any manager! It is putting a loaded gun in the hands of a chimpanzee.

Requests received from others can take many forms:

1. As an “order” from a person of higher rank within the same organisation (Major to Captain, Senior manager to Junior manager, Pope to Cardinal) and bear in mind that such an “order” or “instruction” is not merely a request with an implied sanction, but may also be an empowerment to act, or
2. As an order or an instruction from a person vested with the “authority” to give such an order (a policeman or a judge), or
3. As a “purchase of service” from a supplier which is no more than a request with a promise of reward attached, or
4. As a request for action because of an obligation owed (child to parent or disciple to his *guru*), or
5. A request with a promise (perhaps an implied promise) of reciprocity (between friends), or
6. As a request for assistance from a family member, friend or “relationship” or “network” partner (which is a combination of an obligation owed and a demand for a discharge of duty), or
7. As a request for a service as a discharge of a duty (student to a teacher, client to lawyer, club member to a club official), or
8. As a request by soliciting a favour (beggar to a rich man, employee to employer or a short person to a tall person)

We live today in a world which is a complex interconnected network of requests and actions. Some of these requests lead to actions. A request – once perceived – may lead to further requests (and counter requests), creating a network of requests and a chain of corresponding actions and reactions. Some of the actions are those desired and intended by the original requestor but many are not.

In appointing a manager this is the bottom line – an assessment of the extent to which the person has or can develop or can learn this potential – the power to mobilise actions.

Between any two people, individual or interpersonal power is the capacity of the one to mobilise actions by the other. It is a composite measure of the competence of one to make a comprehensible request for action and of the driving force behind that request. Interpersonal power, as the ability to mobilise actions, can apply in both directions simultaneously and it should not be mistaken to mean the dominance of the one or the subjugation of the other. A helpless infant can have enormous interpersonal power not only on its mother but on all humans in the vicinity. The power of poverty on the affluent is harnessed by every charitable organisation. It is remarkable for example that the power of poverty radiates and can have wide impact whereas the power of wealth needs a sharp focus to generate actions.

This social power reflects the difference of the states of human condition between the two. This is the difference of condition, such as wealth or authority or knowledge or need or social status, which is analogous to the potential difference of voltage or temperature in the physical world. When allied to the inherent virtues of one person it can be manifested as a motive force of the social interaction; as the force of

personality or logic or reason or authority or intellect or any combination of these. It becomes a unique characteristic of the interaction between the two individuals concerned. A manager, of course, needs to deal with many individuals and part of his managerial power, as distinct from interpersonal power, is determined by the extent of his reach. Extent of reach is not the number of individuals he can contact but the number of individuals susceptible to his power to generate actions. Even when dealing with a group of people, the interpersonal power that actually applies is unique to each. For a manager, power then becomes the summation of all the individual interpersonal powers (applying separately or jointly to other individuals within his reach) across the extent of his reach.

$$\text{Managerial power} = \sum \text{interpersonal power across reachable individuals}$$

Whether it is better to have great individual power applying to a few individuals or a lesser power applying to a great many individuals depends on the specific task that the manager is charged with. In large organisations, the number of individuals – excluding one's own subordinates – needed to be reachable by a manager, generally increases as one moves up through the hierarchy. A junior manager may not need to have a very extensive reach. A Production Control Manager may not need as extensive a reach as the Factory manager. Different managerial functions can demand a different extent of reach. The Accounting manager may not need as wide a reach as the Procurement manager.

Most people generally underestimate the level of power they may actually have with another individual. They tend also to underestimate the extent to which their reach actually extends. But there are always cases where some people have an incredibly inflated opinion of their own inherent power and reach. "Know thyself" said the Greeks. It is vitally important that a "good" manager have a reasonably accurate assessment of his own power and, by corollary, of his limitations. Underestimation of one's available power can be paralysing and overestimation can be reckless. But there is no simple instrument such as a potentiometer or a thermometer that can quantify this ability. This potential depends on a combination of the different states of human condition but also on many individual characteristics; judgment, bravery, toughness, integrity, communication skills and an understanding of networks and relationships will all impact the interpersonal power that can be brought to bear.

Much of this ability, this power, can be learned and acquired, and develops with experience. As with most skills, repetition, training and more training does improve the skill. But there is also a part which is unique to the individual – which is determined by his demeanour and his charisma and his character and his genes. Analogies with physics do not work here. This ability to mobilise actions should not be confused with the individuals own competences to carry out actions which themselves would need to be requested; and which would need to be separately mobilised or triggered.

The managerial power to mobilise actions can be compared to – but not equated with – what in the military would be termed "the ability to command". It has long

been recognised that individuals vested with the same command authority exhibit varying degrees of ability to utilise this authority. Military academies, staff colleges, psychological profiling, stress testing and testing under simulated emergency conditions are all used to try and identify those suited to command. However, in the managerial context, while “power” does include the potential to command, it has a much broader scope than just “command ability”. Most managers must be able to mobilise actions from many who are not under their command. In fact, in the industrial or corporate world the majority of the actions to be mobilised in a particular situation may need to be by people outside the direct chain of command and available to a manager. Actions may be needed from government functionaries, superiors, peers, colleagues, suppliers, partners, customers, personal friends, acquaintances and relatives in addition to actions by direct subordinates. Many of these actors may well be under the command of someone else or in a different organisation or part of a competing network. They can even introduce opposing potentials and may decrease the susceptibility of such actors to the manager’s requests for actions. Actions – perhaps mainly as reactions – may also be needed from competitors or other players who have no vested interest in fulfilling the manager’s objectives. They may even have diametrically opposing objectives yet may still need to be mobilised. A Project manager or a Programme manager may have no direct subordinates under his command at all. It can be observed that a military commander also needs to have this wider managerial power in addition to his command ability. This need is probably greatest during times of peace when objectives are more diffuse, and immediate goals are not as narrow, precise or clear-cut as during times of war.

The assessment of this social power in an individual is inevitably subjective to the assessor. Nevertheless it is an assessment, albeit qualitative, which I would recommend should always be made explicitly. Some objectivity can be included by way of the prospective manager’s track record, his grasp of how he may mobilise actions in a hypothetical situation, the extent of his own personal networks, the depth of the relationships in his networks and even well formulated and focused aptitude tests. Personally, I have found the use of hypothetical scenarios during interview sessions and third party assessments of track record – after the interview sessions – the most useful. I have found it fruitful to always include a hypothetical scenario well outside the aspirant’s experience and his comfort zone to explore his understanding and visualisation of how actions could be mobilised. I have always found that those who can visualise a course of action – even in a hypothetical situation – can more readily make judgments and embark on courses of action.

From Having “Power” to the “Exercise of Power”

Having the social power to mobilise actions – in the form of his states of human condition and his inherent virtues – is a necessary requirement for a manager to be “good”, but it is not a sufficient condition. Can he put the power to use? Can it be

converted into the concerted actions of others? This brings us to the second component of our definition. Can the power be exercised? Of course, if power is absent then its exercise becomes moot but, having power does not always lead to its exercise.

"If you do not ask, you do not get" is a maxim which applies. No request made means no power is exercised. The ability to exercise power grows with the exercise itself. The more one has applied or tried to exercise the power, the better the assessment or the self-assessment. A key factor in making an assessment of a prospective manager then becomes one of investigating the frequency and extent to which the aspirant has actually attempted to apply his power and whether he has learnt from his failures.

The exercise of power involves channelling the power by way of requests into actions. Can the requests which mobilise actions be generated with the appropriate people and perceived correctly by them? It consists therefore of the formulation of requests of oneself and of the surrounding environment in such a manner that actions result. Requests which are misunderstood, or fall on deaf ears, or on the wrong ears, or which do not trigger any action, or which lead to actions different to those intended may constitute a failure in the exercise of power rather than a lack of power. A parent who gets no response when ordering a 10 year old to tidy his room probably has the required social power but fails to exercise it. (But, if it was a 16 year old for example, who rejected a parental instruction; it is then more likely to be a case of an insufficient social power with the parent rather than a failing in the exercise of power.) Extending our use of the physics metaphor where we took power to be a Scalar quantity and a magnitude describing a potential to mobilise actions, the "exercise of power" now requires that the power have direction. The "exercise" of power becomes a Vector whereas the power was Scalar. The direction is towards oneself or towards those who have been chosen as being necessary to be mobilised into actions. Just as the magnitude and directions of Vectors can be added together to give a resultant Vector, power exercised in different directions also gives a "resultant" applying to the exercise. Many exercises of power in the same direction are also additive. Choosing the wrong actors or any other misdirection is essentially a failure of the exercise of power. By direction I mean both the path and the destination. For example, requesting a plumber to fix your car – even if he understands the request and is willing to act – could be a case of misdirected power by having an inappropriate destination and could lead to an expensive failure of the exercise of power. Similarly, a memorandum demanding an action, but sent to 20 subordinates could result in nobody being activated. This would also be misdirection since there would be no direction at all and it would be a failure of exercise. A manager who has difficulty to delegate and tries to take on too much himself is also misdirecting his power and failing in the exercise of power. Inevitably the exercise of power is, at the time of action, dependent upon the recipient of the request for action and his perception of the request. In consequence the formulation of a request must be tailored to produce such a perception in the mind of the recipient so as to be at least sufficient to overcome whatever inertia may exist and to initiate the intended action. Different people may well require different requests to

bring forth precisely the same resultant action. Identical requests to different people could lead to action in one case and no action in another or elicit completely different actions.

Perhaps Henry II was actually a very clever manager who had intended the elimination of Becket all along, but needed deniability. Perhaps he had calculated precisely and correctly that his rhetorical and apparently directionless question – which could always be repudiated – would, in fact, be taken by the listening knights to be a Royal command and a request for action (as it was)!

It is the manager's judgment – which I deal with separately as a fundamental characteristic – which determines his objectives, his choices regarding the actions to be taken and his choice of people to carry out the chosen actions. It is his judgment which provides the direction for the exercise of power. The directions in which power is exercised need to be correct. Without direction, power is dissipated uselessly. Misdirected power also leads to depletion of the power itself and, if the wrong actions are elicited, to unwanted actions and all their consequences and to “collateral damage”. Merely the existence of collateral damage – whether in war or in a managerial situation – is symptomatic to me of misdirected power and synonymous with a failing in the exercise of power. This does not mean that I conclude that misdirection is always unavoidable. What I do contend, however, is that though collateral damage may not be avoidable, it is always a consequence of, and an indicator of, a failing in the exercise of power. It would always have been a more correctly directed and better exercise of power if there had been no collateral damage. Misdirection or collateral damage may be symptomatic of “noise”. Just as in physics where it is unfocused, random, and disruptive and hides the true signal, “noise” in the context of managerial actions indicates a lack of direction or misdirection and a failing of exercise. A “noisy” manager is one who creates a high level of collateral damage and disqualifies himself from being a good manager.

Having chosen the complete set of actions to be implemented, and the actors to be put into play, our prospective manager must not only have the requisite social power but also the acumen and competence to formulate and communicate his requests to suit the recipients of the requests and to cause them to perform the desired actions. He needs to have the insight that the very same request can cause different actions from different people. He must be able to determine how his requests must be tailored for different people to elicit the desired actions. This in turn requires true communication skills as opposed to the mere transfer of information (and I treat communication itself separately as being a fundamental characteristic of a “good” manager).

Power (+ judgment of direction + communication) \gg exercise of power

While it is important to distinguish between power and the exercise of power, they are often so closely inter-connected that it is usually practical to try and assess these simultaneously.

Assessment by the Use of Hypothetical Scenarios

To be able to gauge that an individual is capable of exercising power we must be able to assess his skill in eliciting desired actions from various chosen recipients by means of the requests he communicates. The same hypothetical scenarios used to investigate whether he has power can now be extended to test whether he can also exercise power. I have found it convenient to do this by varying, in the hypothetical scenarios, the number or the quality of people available to him, where some are subordinates and others are not. I have found the use of hypothetical scenarios in an interview the most useful technique of getting engaged responses and then making assessments.

I have used general as well as real case studies to develop the hypothetical scenarios. Typical examples of hypothetical scenarios I have used to get aspirants to imagine themselves in are:

- *As a Sales manager when a market collapses or a product becomes obsolete, or*
- *As a Production manager having to manage the fear and opposition when technology and manufacturing are to be transferred from a factory in Europe to a new one in Asia, or*
- *As Harley-Davidson's Marketing manager when Honda introduced their 50 cc mopeds into the US*

I also like to ask aspirants how they would see themselves behave in an emergency situation such as, for example:

- *As the Personnel manager of a company in Kobe when the earthquake hit, or*
- *As the Communications manager for a company when one of its products has failed and has caused a fatal injury, or*
- *As Exxon's Transport manager when the Exxon Valdez spilled its crude oil in Prince William Sound in the Gulf of Alaska, or*
- *As the Manufacturing manager at a location in Europe when a wild-cat strike breaks out over a wage claim*

The important thing, of course, is to design the scenarios to be open-ended and such that there is no right or wrong response. It is the comprehension of the scenario and the breadth of the response and its level of detail which reveals what the aspirant can or cannot visualise. I have found it useful at times to present an incomplete scenario and invite the subject to further develop the scenario itself before addressing the actions that could be contemplated. Such responses can also reveal the in-built self assessment by the applicant of his inherent power to mobilise actions.

Within a 2–3 h interview period I have generally found it possible to present the aspirant with two – sometimes three – hypothetical scenarios to address; one within his area of experience and within his comfort zone, and one or two outside his comfort zone either as scenarios beyond his area of experience or in some emergency situation.

I have also found that getting opinions from third parties and referees is most productive after having first conducted such an interview. This allows the formulation of specific questions based upon his actual performance during the interview. The opinions of his peers can be very frank and forthcoming – though very rarely wholly negative – when sharp, pointed, specific questions can be posed. Questions of a general nature when put to referees or colleagues prior to any interview usually lead to bland, polite and vaguely positive responses which may not be very revealing or useful at all. General references can also be very misleading in cases where the aspirant has actually been asked to resign from his previous position, but is provided with glowing testimonials – perhaps as the price of a “quiet resignation” or to assuage the conscience of his previous superior.

During an interview I have found it helpful to have prepared in advance the two or three hypothetical scenarios within which to place the applicant. Over the years I have learned to allow the aspirant some time – perhaps 15 or 20 min – between presenting him with the scenario and then getting him to describe his behaviour within the scenario. Such exercises can shed light on not only his power and ability to exercise power but also on the other contributing factors such as judgment, strength, communication skills and integrity. My notes from such interviews have then generally been organised into two categories; the first noting my direct assessments of his attributes, and the second recording those specific issues or areas of concern which could be further illuminated by formulating the right questions to his peers and referees.

The Proper Exercise of Power

Al Gini

The central issue of power in leadership is not “Will it be used?”, but rather “Will it be used wisely and well?”

There is a large step between being able to exercise power and exercising it properly. Will it be used wisely and well? Power, to be exercised, must have “a particular purpose”, an objective. This purpose itself must be a conscious decision, a result of the manager’s judgments achieved after an exercise of mind. They may be simple judgments with low consequential risks and perhaps relating to the routine and familiar actions required on most days. They could be very complex, risk-filled judgments, leaping from visions and strategies through strategic objectives to the short term goals to be achieved. Even though the purpose or the objectives may be abundantly clear and well formulated, it is again managerial judgment which is needed to determine the complete set of actions that are “necessary and sufficient” (including reactions and counter-actions) and which could bring about the desired objective. The company of players to implement these actions must be identified and marshalled. Some of the players may need to be empowered. The roles of the various players must be clear, not only to the manager but to the players as well.

The music itself must be written and orchestrated. The consensus needed among the key players, regarding the score to be played and the timing to be used, must be wrought. Where necessary, networks must be activated and relationships brought into play. Communications must be specifically tailored for and directed with precision to the correct players to generate the necessary requests.

At one extreme in the exercise of power is paralysis of action. Such paralysis occurs when the manager in spite of having power and in spite of having made the appropriate analyses finds he is unable to make the final judgment and to make the required choices. To take no action is always a valid option but needs to be a conscious decision, in which case it is not a case of paralysis. At the other extreme we have the manager who rushes to judgment. This can result in a surfeit of actions where many options are addressed simultaneously in the hope that some of the actions will be beneficial. In between these extremes lies the proper exercise of power, wholly dependent upon the manager's judgments and the quality of his judgments.

To achieve his objectives, a manager needs to "conduct" the orchestra of all the different individuals he selects to carry out the "necessary and sufficient" actions. He has to elicit these actions by using a combination of different types of requests – designed specifically to mobilise and motivate the action needed from that particular individual. Different forms of requests are usually available for use with any particular individual. The manager needs to choose the form of request best suited to the individual needed to carry out an action. A manager may as needs dictate order, or threaten, or purchase, or trade, or borrow, or beg, or cajole, or simply request the various players to generate the set of actions that he has determined are required.

(Objectives) + exercise of power + (choice of players + motivation + networks)
 >> proper exercise of power

Power, properly directed through judgment and communication, leads to its exercise by generating actions. To get from the exercise of power to the proper exercise of power needs first the introduction of objectives or a purpose. Additionally it needs the actors to have been chosen and sufficiently motivated for the mobilisation of the selected actions. It is the difference between a football coach instructing the team vaguely to "go out there and do your best" to his engaging in a pre-match team meeting and saying to each player, "go out there and play and play your designated role because that will enable others to play their specific roles and for us to win". The set of actions must be all those that are "necessary" and therefore not be lacking in any way. They must also just be "sufficient" and therefore not exceed the set of required actions. No easy matter!

To assess the ability of a prospective manager to properly exercise power requires the assessor to take a holistic view and to consider all the fundamental attributes making up the individual. His track record, his performance at well structured interviews and the evidence of his peers and referees, are the primary tools available to the assessor. These can go far, but the final judgment is subjective

and that of the assessor. It says as much about the assessor as it does about the subject. The subsequent appointment of a manager is itself a managerial task and involves taking risk. But the rewards of making a sound selection and appointing the right person to the right position at the right time are immense.

Consider our appointed manager in a situation of urgency. He gathers together all the relevant information and knowledge, applies his mind (and that of others), makes his judgments and decides on his objective. He makes all the necessary analyses and cross-checks the results against his intuition. He determines the actions necessary to meet his objectives. He chooses just those players needed to generate the complete set of actions and reactions and counter-actions that would be necessary and sufficient to his purpose. He gives the instructions required to his subordinates. He activates individuals from within the networks in his scope of influence and applies his relationships. He motivates all the other players. He then conducts his chosen orchestra. The primary actions are taken and their interactions unfold. Lead players act and set in train further chains of actions. Adverse reactions are pre-empted. Other reactions are anticipated and met by counter-actions. Eventually, as the actions mobilised have their desired effect, the objective is achieved.

“He does the thing”.

No missing players. No missed actions.

No extra players. No wasted actions.

No misdirection. No collateral damage.

No dissipation of energy.

No cheers. No jeers.

No fuss, no “muss”.

No turbulence.

No noise!

Just the music of the proper exercise of power!

- *Like Matt Busby's majestic Manchester United of the 1960s winning the European Cup in 1968, or*
- *Like the breathtaking speed with which Percy Barnevik merged ASEA of Sweden with BBC of Switzerland and created the new ABB brand, or*
- *Like the controlled and delicate power of Alfred Brendel playing Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata.*

A manager who has succeeded in the proper exercise of power is in no doubt about it when it happens. Just as when the batsman or the golfer knows without question when the ball has been struck by the “sweet spot” on his bat or his driver. For a good manager it should not be too unusual an occurrence. But it is rare enough that when it happens, it is truly memorable.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s I was trying, from ABB in Sweden, to sell a power plant based on a new technology to the Electric Power Development Corporation in Japan for their Wakamatsu site. The power generation industry is extremely conservative and “first-of-a-kind” risks are not popular. The effort to convince the customer to invest in the new technology had been in progress for

almost 2 years. The perceived risk for the utility company had been mitigated by the project being designated a National project with approval and funding then being required from the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MITI). But this solution created a new problem for us when it activated a sudden and formidable competition from Hitachi. They invoked the fact that it was to be classified as a National project with Government funds, to advance the view that the power plant supplier therefore needed to be Japanese. Hitachi did not have the required technology but managed to convince the political establishment that they would be able to acquire it. For even the proponents of our technology within EPDC, this was seen as being an unanswerable argument in favour of Hitachi, since Japanese national pride was now at stake. Hitachi even condescended to inviting me to a meeting where they asked me, very politely, not to disturb the status quo and to withdraw our offer, since it was their “turn” to receive an order from EPDC. I managed to remain polite while declining their offer. Our own Japanese VP for Sales felt the case was lost but I was disinclined to give up. With the encouragement of my bosses at the time, Carsten Olesen and Göran Lundberg, we decided to try to change the game. With the help of the Swedish Embassy and under the time pressure of an impending bilateral trade meeting, we succeeded, to get it accepted within the Japanese Foreign Ministry and subsequently within MITI and other Government circles that hurting bilateral relations between Japan and Sweden might result in a bigger national loss of face. Furthermore, we pointed out that permitting an import from Sweden, even for a National project, at a time when the Japanese export surplus was of world-wide concern, could gain them some valuable brownie points. It was perhaps not entirely by design, but we had hit the sweet spot and the opposition melted away. Hitachi eventually withdrew gracefully since it was now in the national interest that they do so, and we signed the contract a few months later. But it was when we changed the game being played and we saw the internal memorandum from MITI acknowledging and adopting our arguments as their own that we knew that we had connected with the “sweet spot”.

A few years later I had the unpleasant, but necessary task, of carrying out a drastic downsizing at a boiler manufacturing factory in India. There were three strong unions on the site in Durgapur with reputations for being militant. The factory was located in West Bengal which had a Communist State Government at the time. But by focusing on the employees, on taking care of their interests and on ensuring future employment at the site, we succeeded in getting the State Government to agree, at least, not to oppose the planned reductions. This absence of opposition from the State Government was critical in curtailing the political options available to the unions. But we did not hit the “sweet spot” until we managed to get the unions actively engaged. Though they always remained opposed in principle, they helped us, albeit unofficially, in identifying the individual fears of employees and to accept that their members could be approached with propositions. We needed to reduce our strength to less than 900 people to match our order backlog and preferably to around 600 if the business plan was to be truly viable. In the event a work force of around 1,500 was voluntarily reduced to less than 700.

It was late one evening in Delhi, at an informal and unscheduled meeting with the leaders of two of the three unions that we had come to a practical meeting of minds. The third union also acquiesced a few days later but it is this particular meeting which sticks in my memory as the defining moment and the real “sweet spot” of this exercise.

Within 18 months of the downsizing, the unit which had made losses continuously for over 10 years, had turned around, started winning new orders, and could start recruiting again with a healthy view of the future.

The exercise of power is a manager’s stock-in-trade but a “good” manager knows and strives for the music of the proper exercise of power.

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821)

I love power. But it is as an artist that I love it. I love it as a musician loves his violin, to draw out its sounds and chords and harmonies

Napoleon was no stranger either to power or the proper exercise of power – until finally, corrupted by his own absolute power, he promoted himself to his level of incompetence!



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Pillai, K.

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