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Angela M. Jones

angela.meyers20@gmail.com

Sheri L. York

sheri.l.york@gmail.com

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The Fragile Balance of Power and Leadership



ANGELA M. JONES SHERI L. YORK
SCHERERVILLE, IN NEW YORK, NY



Abstract

The aim of this article is to first define effective leadership and power, highlighting the differences between the two. The focal point is that power and effective leadership are not interchangeable and should not be treated as such. Power is a tool while effective leadership is a skill. Simply because a person wields power does not necessarily mean that he or she is an effective leader. Conversely, we will discuss how a leader is unquestionably endowed with a certain degree of power in order to maintain that particular position. Finally, because leaders have power at their disposal, we will explore ways in which power can negatively affect a leader, rendering that individual largely ineffective and exposing the extremely fragile relationship between these two terms.

Leadership

Defining Effective Leadership

Inherently, every organization is headed by an individual or group of individuals occupying an elevated position of authority within the company. More importantly, though, every *successful* organization is headed by an *effective* leader or an infrastructure of *effective* leaders. Hence, choosing key decision-makers is paramount to the success of an organization. But what makes an effective leader?

Throughout this article, it is important to keep in mind that a distinction exists between *leader* and *effective leader*. This distinction is an important one because every leader is not necessarily an effective one. In the most elementary of definitions, *Webster's Dictionary* defines "leadership" as "the power or ability to lead other people" and "leader" as "something that leads" (*Merriam-Webster*, 2011). "Leader," then, is simply the title of a person who leads others. In this sense, the term *leader* can be interchangeable with *boss* and *manager* as they both technically lead their subordinates. No matter what the title, one commonality exists: it is a relationship between people.

That said, ask any person what being a leader means to him or her and you will undoubtedly hear a different response every time: a leader is someone who can oversee a team in order to accomplish collective goals or someone who can inspire others to perform at their highest potential. Most of these responses hint toward the definition of an effective leader and that is likely because when people think about a person of authority, they typically picture a virtuous, competent individual. With this understanding, we continued our research with a

focus on *effective* leadership. After all, it is the desire to become, or the longing to work for, an effective leader that we seek.

Despite being the subject of research by many philosophers, psychologists, and management scholars for decades, the definition of effective leadership is increasingly complex and evolving. That said, two key themes surfaced through our exploration: not only is it a relationship between people, it is a relationship between people who are working toward a *common goal*. Warren Bennis expounds, “Leadership is grounded in a relationship. In its simplest form, it is a tripod – a leader or leaders, followers, and the common goal that they want to achieve. None of these elements can survive without the others” (Bennis, 2007). Effective leadership, then, is grounded in an “us” mentality where the leader is in the role to aid the group in achieving its goal. The leader is neither a glory-seeker nor a self-aggrandizer.

In order to better understand effective leadership, it was necessary to evaluate the characteristics of an effective leader. In doing so, we found ourselves reverting back to the comparison of an effective leader to a manager/boss (or, as noted above, simply a superior) – a concept that many can easily understand from personal work experience. Most people can pinpoint a time when they realized that they were working for a manager, but not necessarily an effective leader. In this scenario, a manager is typically perceived as someone who is focused on completing a certain task, primarily for the purpose of supporting his or her own personal gain, and who is not generally concerned with group cohesion and success of others or the group as a whole. In some extreme situations, managers can even hinder the success of other group members in an effort to secure their own positions.

As discussed in Harvard Business Review’s *Three Differences between Managers and Leaders*, “management consists of controlling a group or a set of entities to accomplish a goal. Leadership refers to an individual’s ability to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute toward organizational success” (Nayar, 2013). “One of the central tasks of a leader is to facilitate social coordination and cooperation to enhance group success” (Mead, 2010; Van Vugt, 2008). So, again, the difference between a manager and a leader is essentially an “us” versus a “me” mentality.

In a *Business Daily News* article, Brittney Helmrigh tried to crack the code to identify effective leadership by asking 33 different business managers, owners, and experts to provide their own definitions of effective leadership (Helmrigh, 2016). Interestingly, she received 33 different answers. We found this article to be intriguing because we could relate to, and believe there was some truth inherent in, the substance of each answer. Several of these responses are summarized as follows:

- “Leadership is the ability to help people achieve things they don’t think are possible. Leaders are coaches with a passion for developing people, not players; they get satisfaction from achieving objectives through others. Leaders inspire people through a shared vision and create an environment where people feel valued and fulfilled.”
— **Randy Stocklin, Co-founder and CEO, Readers.com**
- “Effective leadership is providing the vision and motivation to a team so they work together toward the same goal, and then understanding the talents and

temperaments of each individual and effectively motivating each person to contribute individually their best toward achieving the group goal.”

— **Stan Kimer, President, Total Engagement Consulting by Kimer**

- “Leadership is caring more about the cause and the people in your company than about your own personal pain and success. It is about having a greater vision of where your company is trying to go while leaving the path open for others to grow into leaders”

— **Jarie Bolander, COO and co-founder, Lab Sensor Solutions** (Helmrich, 2016).

In deciphering all 33 responses in tandem with the relevant literature, we noted an underlying theme: Leaders consistently demonstrate “softer skills”¹ in their interactions with others in order to inspire and achieve a common goal.

Take trust, for example. We hypothesize that one of the most critical components to effective leadership is establishing a trustworthy relationship. We have also found that trust is directly linked to whether a leader is perceived as ethical. In her book, *Ethics, the Heart of Leadership*, Joanne Ciulla expresses a belief that ethics is the heart of leadership and a good leader is both ethical and effective (Ciulla, 2004). She continues to explain that “Followers must first choose to accept a leader before leadership may commence. Followers accept leaders they can trust and trust is gained two ways: by looking at the leader’s history and observing them in the present” (Ciulla, 2004). So it follows that effective leaders must be able to demonstrate ethical and trustworthy behaviors in order to be viewed as someone of influence.

In one of my (York) favorite books, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins introduces the importance of these softer skills through a comparison of companies that were able to leap from good to great results with those that failed to improve or sustain that improvement (Collins, 2001). The data suggested that one common trend related to the characteristics of the company’s leaders — all good-to-great companies demonstrated what he refers to as “Level 5 leadership” (Collins, 2001). The 5 levels of leadership are explained in Table 1 below:

Table 1

LEVEL 5 - Executive	<i>Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.</i>
LEVEL 4 - Effective Leader	<i>Catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, stimulating higher performance standards.</i>
LEVEL 3 - Competent Manager	<i>Organizes people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives.</i>
LEVEL 2 - Contributing Team Member	<i>Contributes individual capabilities to the achievement of group objectives and works effectively with others in a group setting.</i>
LEVEL 1 - Highly Capable Individual	<i>Makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits.</i>

(Collins, 2001).

¹ “Soft skills” are personality traits or characteristics that enable us to work effectively with other people. Many define soft skills as one’s “EQ” (Emotional Intelligence Quotient).

Summarily, Collins found that effective leaders demonstrated both extreme personal humility and intense professional will — an unwavering focus on making their companies great (Collins, 2001). These leaders set their egos aside for the greater good of meeting the team or company's objectives. "It's not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious — but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves" (Collins, 2001). In fact, Collins's study found that in over two-thirds of studied companies, the presence of a gargantuan personal ego contributed to the demise or continued mediocrity of a company (Collins, 2001).

Continuing with the theme of humility, we noted other softer skills which were commonly cited in effective leaders. For example, Daniel Goleman found that "emotional intelligence" proved to be twice as important as IQ or technical skills. The key components of emotional intelligence were delineated as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 1998). Yet another vital skill attributed to effective leaders — which could also be considered a soft skill — is self-confidence. This is seen in a person who is secure in his/her abilities and position and does not feel easily threatened by another who has skills or other positive attributes. Insecurities in a leader will absolutely trickle down and negatively affect a leader's ability to be effective. Unfortunately, insecurities plague most people and are usually deeply-rooted.

In conclusion, while we believe an effective leader must have a foundation grounded in the traditional leadership skills such as a vision for success, intelligence, technical skills, etc., we also conclude that effective leadership is distinguished by the so-called "softer skills" like trust, humility, emotional intelligence, and self-confidence.

Becoming an Effective Leader

We have all heard the phrase "that person is a *born leader*." While this is certainly an easy way to compliment individuals on their leadership capabilities, it has in fact been the study of many organizations, universities, and psychologists. This is primarily due to companies spending billions of dollars annually on leadership development initiatives to uncover effective leaders. The salient findings of several of these studies are summarized as follows:

As it relates to leaders being "born," preliminary results from a study of identical and fraternal twins indicates that approximately 30% of variation in leadership style was accounted for by heritability; the remaining variation was attributed to differences in environmental factors (role models or early opportunities for leadership development). This study, among others, puts forward a view that the "life context" one grows up in and works in is much more important than heritability in predicting leadership skills (Avolio, p. 425).

Similarly, in a recent study from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, a fifteen-week academic course was able to significantly improve the leadership skills of the participants, supporting the theory expressed above that leadership skills are primarily learned behaviors (Winch, 2015). Another theory agrees that leadership can be taught and suggests that the most effective way to develop leadership skills is through the "70-20-10" model: 70% refers to learning through on-the-job experience, 20% to social coaching and mentoring, and 10% to formal skills development programs (LeStage, 2014). It may be inferred, then, that classroom-style learning may certainly serve as a foundation and periodic refresher on leadership skills. That said, organizations would be better served by spending their time and resources on creating a culture whereby employees are learning from effective leaders

through day-to-day interactions and coaching. Although there is still plenty of research to be completed in this area, it seems to follow that leadership skills can be honed with the right level of focus, coaching, and work experience.

Examples of Effective Leadership

Some of the most preeminently cited examples of effective leaders include Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr, all of whom began with a vision, effectively communicated that vision, and built a team of supporting leaders to strive collectively to attain change — whether in the form of advocating for freedom in South Africa, ending slavery in the U.S., or leading the Civil Rights Movement.

In our experiences as well, effective leaders are not simply discernable by how they act, but rather how they create a culture of leadership around them (*Forbes*, 2016). Some of our (York) most successful teams or group environments have thrived in a culture of leadership whereby everyone in the group has an opportunity to lead in some way; where all team members demonstrate ownership and accountability and are fully engaged in their daily activities.

When I (York) reflect on the leaders of my organization, I am constantly humbled by the effectiveness of our leadership team. Over the last several years, our leadership team has become more fully engaged with its employees. In a company where the average age of an employee is 27 years old (i.e., Millennials) and supervisors are primarily Gen X or Baby Boomers, this heightened interaction commanded careful crafting. For example, the younger generation demanded better technology to more effectively and efficiently perform their work. In return, the company invested in smart phone apps and mobile platforms, and implemented Google for work collaboration tools (Google Hang-outs, Google Drive and Mail, etc). To me, this is one of many examples that demonstrates that leaders must have an ability to adapt their thinking and mindsets in order to drive their teams towards a common goal. Leaders should not be myopic nor risk-averse.

At PwC, we strive to cultivate a sense of “leadership at all levels” within our audit teams wherein leaders do not only communicate their vision to the team, but strive to achieve a common vision collectively within the workforce. What commonly occurs is that those in supervisory roles who successfully elicit group feedback and participation immediately begin to discern comprehensive leadership skills and accountability, resulting in a group collectively espousing a common goal. Additionally, PwC invests in, and provides opportunities for, individuals to lead and demonstrate leadership skills at the very beginning of their respective careers. As a result, the organization continuously invests in the development of its employees. Dignifying each employee by investing in his/her skills development, genuinely listening to suggestions, and comprehensively engaging such employee in the company’s operational process all serve to cultivate a team-oriented environment.

Whether the reader can personally relate to this author’s (York) experiences at PwC, one’s own personal experience with managers, bosses, and other supervisors, or even to selected historical figures, identifying a capable leader is typically not a challenge. Based upon our research and opinion, an *effective* leader is someone who can elevate his/her foundation of technical skills and singular vision through humility and emotional maturity to achieve a common goal while creating leaders at all levels. *Effective* leadership, then, is a skill.

Power

Defining Power

As was the case with defining leadership, one simple and universal definition of *power* does not exist, although theorists have been struggling to do so over millennia. As author Robert Dahl stated, “. . . the concept of power is as ancient and ubiquitous as any that social theory can boast” (Dahl, 1957). Oxford Dictionaries defines “power” as “the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events.” Psychological science defines it as one’s capacity to alter another person’s condition or state of mind by providing or withholding resources while Robert Dahl reduces it to a mathematical equation (Definition, 2016; Dahl, 1957).

Literature identified some consistencies to help provide a workable definition. First, as with leadership, the concept of power can be equated as a relationship between people. Second, acquiescence by the subject over whom power is exerted is fundamental and the required reaction of the dominated person is essential for power to even exist. In the most general sense, power is as Dahl has suggested: a relationship between people where A has the power over B to the extent that he/she can require B to do something that B would not otherwise do (Dahl, 1957). Power then, for purposes of this article, is something that a person *possesses* over another person; it is a tool that a person uses to achieve the desired result.

Considering that power is a tool used to denote a certain relationship between people, ostensibly the most influential theories or studies regarding the concept of power emanate from the fields of psychology or sociology and are discussed below.

Bases of Power

French and Raven (1959) categorized and defined the types/bases of power that exist in human domination which are more fully explained in Table 2:

Table 2

BASES	DESCRIPTORS
Reward Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The power whose basis is the ability to reward.• Can lead to better performance as long as the employee sees a clear link between performance and rewards.• Associated with short-term results.
Coercive Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The power whose basis is the ability to punish.• Often associated with negative side effects and short-term results.
Legitimate Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A person’s ability to influence another’s behavior because of the position the powerful person holds.• Sometimes referred to as <i>position power</i>.• Can be depended on initially but can create dissatisfaction, resistance, and frustration among employees.
Referent Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defined as a feeling of “oneness” between the powerful and the subject or a desire for such an identity.• Based, in part, upon the subject’s attraction (not just in the physical sense) to the powerful person.• The subject has a desire to be closely associated with the powerful person.• The greater the attraction, the greater the identification, and consequently the greater the referent power.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops out of admiration for another. • Can lead to enthusiastic and unquestioning trust, compliance, loyalty and commitment from subordinates.
Expert Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the powerful person's knowledge, skills, or ability and depends on the subject's perception that the powerful person has these qualities.

(French, 1959; Lunenburg, 2012).

In later years, Raven referred to a sixth basis of power which was not included in the original publication due to a disagreement with French over its suitability for inclusion (Raven, 1992). This power, *Informational Power*, was defined by Raven as the use of information by a supervisor to convince the subordinate to acquiesce (Raven, 1992). Another suggested basis of power, *Empowerment*, was introduced in *The Power Pyramid: How to Get Power by Giving It Away* (1990) and Lunenburg's *Power and Leadership: An Influence Process* (Tracy, 1990; Lunenburg, 2012). It was suggested that empowerment — achieving power by giving it to others — is an emerging basis of power. As noted by the authors, power flows from the bottom up “. . . If you are successful in giving your people power, they will surely lift you on their shoulders to heights of power and success you never dreamed possible . . .” (Tracy, 1990).

Identifying and defining these bases was a quintessential step in understanding the concept of power. Copious studies have been conducted since their introduction in an attempt to provide additional definitional reference. Those of most importance consist of the studies that demonstrate which bases garner short-term versus long-term results and which evoke negative emotions/resistance versus a certain kinship and respect. Ultimately, people who exert power will typically employ more than one basis. Aligning with the authors' conclusion that power is a tool — coupled with the salient characteristics of an effective leader previously discussed — we hypothesize that an effective leader utilizes different bases (*Referent*, *Expert*, and *Legitimate*) more often than a person who simply holds a particular position of power (*Reward* and *Coercive*).

For example, in one of my (Jones) past working environments, much emphasis was placed on the particular title or position held in the firm. It was simply understood that I was an Associate; therefore, I had to perform certain tasks relevant to that title. Failure to do so would ultimately stymie any quest for promotion to Partner or worse, lead to termination. Associates were frequently reminded that they were replaceable. I would repeatedly ask to assume new opportunities to further develop my cases yet my requests were consistently denied. If I challenged authority or had a different perspective on a legal argument, I was informed that I lacked sufficient experience to posture such an opinion. In this environment, I never felt that my superiors had much concern for individual growth or desired to harvest my talents for the good of the organization. Because of the lack of effective leadership and the inefficacious use of authority within this organization, there was, unsurprisingly, a high turnover of Associates — including myself. Conversely, however, I have also worked for several well-respected and seasoned trial attorneys who served as sources of inspiration and motivation through their practices and methodologies. These people invested in me, empowered me, listened to my ideas, and allowed me space to professionally flourish by giving me opportunities to develop my cases more fully and I respected them immensely for it. In summary, then, my first related experience displayed the use of *coercive and reward* power while the second demonstrated an example of *referent and expert* power. In

reference to the latter, those holding positions of authority could genuinely be referred to as *effective leaders*.

The Motivation Behind Power

Another study, *The Evolution of Prestige*, aimed to define the motivation behind power (Gil-White, 1999).² Gil-White and Henrich differentiated between dominance and prestige motivations for power (Gil-White, 1999). “Dominance reflects an approach in which individuals attain and use power via force and the selfish manipulation of group resources” (Mead, 2010). Prestige reflects an approach whereby people attain influence because they garner respect and employ valuable skills or knowledge to help the group achieve its goal (Mead, 2010). Gil-White and Henrich were not the only theorists who differentiated between a self-interested motive and a group-interested motive; a distinction was also made between personalized power (using power for personal gain) and socialized power (using power to benefit other people) (McClelland, 1970, 1975; Winter, 1973; French & Raven, 1959). In that regard, we believe personalized power and dominance power are one in the same as are socialized power and prestige power.

Clearly, the motivation behind power has a dividing line between “for me” or “for us.” We find these pieces particularly useful in defining the theory of power as the motives behind one’s desire for power may dictate which bases are utilized and thus determine whether that person is an effective leader or simply a person in power. Table 3 below depicts the differences between dominance/personalized power and prestige/socialized power:

Table 3

Dominance/Personalized Power	Prestige/Socialized Power
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status by force or threat. • Imposed status. • Personal gain. • Marked by furthering your own interest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status through achievement. • Freely-conferred status. • Influence and not authority or power. • Opinions are heavily weighed (not obeyed). • Prestigious leaders get their way because others believe that they should (they have earned the right). • Characterized by words such as respect, awe, devotion, reverence, esteem, approval, and love.

(Gil-White, 1999; Goode, 1978).

Knowing the motivation behind power can explain why someone chooses to employ a certain basis over another. For instance, we hypothesize that a person who is motivated by dominance/personalized power will utilize the *Reward* and *Coercive* basis and one motivated by prestige/socialized power will utilize the *Referent* and *Expert* basis. Therefore, and taking it one step further, a person whose aim is simply to maintain a power position is motivated by dominance/personalized power whereas a person whose aim is to be an effective leader is motivated by prestige/socialized power.

The Perception of Power: Good Versus Evil

Exploring the categories of motivation behind power led to the discovery of a prevailing theme in literature regarding power: power is evil and power corrupts. This theme is so

² Like Dahl, Gil-White and Henrich also considered power as a relationship between people.

prevalent that it appears power has developed a more negative than positive connotation. Recall that such was not the case with leadership. We blame Niccolo Machiavelli for pioneering this siege of negative press on power for it was Machiavelli who wrote that “[i]t is much safer to be feared than loved” (Machiavelli, 1955). Machiavelli’s teachings in *The Prince* laid the groundwork of power as a game that is still discussed in modern literature. For example, David Kipnis’s study in *Does Power Corrupt?* essentially found that power increases the likelihood that a person will attempt to manipulate others. Further, he revealed that “. . . subjects with power thought less about their subordinates’ performance, viewed them as objects of manipulation, and expressed the desire to maintain social distance from them” (Kipnis, 1971).

Consider a more mainstream example, national bestseller *The 48 Laws of Power* by Robert Greene (Greene, 2000). Greene’s step-by-step instructions on how to obtain power are inherently repugnant. I (Jones) personally submerged herself in *The 48 Laws of Power* only to emerge positively riveted — not in the way of a person obtaining useful real-world knowledge, but merely as a reader of fiction. I found myself correlating *The 48 Laws of Power* to the antics of the antagonist characters of *Game of Thrones*. However, I had to remind myself, this book was not meant to be fiction, but rather to be nefariously utilized as a “how-to” in the real world context. While there are many useful anecdotes contained within, the predominant takeaway was that in order to become powerful, one must conceal, manipulate, and dominate. This is reflected in several of the chapter titles: “Conceal your Intentions,” “Court Attention at all Costs,” “Get Others to Do the Work for You — but Always Take the Credit!,” “Use Selective Honesty and Generosity to Disarm your Victim,” and “Pose as a Friend — Work as a Spy.” Unfortunately, Greene’s book has perpetuated the acquired understanding that power is an “evil” thing.

Alternately, Keltner (2007), in *The Power Paradox*, attempts to debunk the Machiavellian approach and aims to resurrect an element of positivity to the concept of power by breaking it down to its simplest form (D.K., 2007). Keltner states that “[p]ower is not something limited to power-hungry individuals or organizations; it is part of every social interaction where people have the capacity to influence one another’s states, which is really every moment in life.” “To be human is to be immersed in power dynamics” (D.K., 2007). This would be akin to a child exerting power over a parent to respond automatically to satisfy its basic needs of eating and sleeping yet reciprocally, the parent has the power to determine the content of the food and the schedule for bedtime.

The authors ascribe to the Keltner explanation. And if we believe Keltner, then power really is not necessarily repugnant; power just *is*. It *is* in each and every one of us and is used in all daily interactions, both personal and professional. It is not inherently evil nor is it not inherently praiseworthy. But, if used incorrectly, power *can* be evil and it *can* corrupt.

Power and Effective Leadership are not Synonymous

The problem we are experiencing in our respective work cultures, social circles, and political affiliations, is that people tend to assume a powerful person is also an effective leader. However, the concepts of power and effective leadership are not synonymous and should not be treated as such. In fact, given the right circumstances, it can be detrimental to growth and organizational success to assume the two are complementary. Power is just one of many tools that effective leaders have at their disposal whereas leadership is an acquired

skill. Simply put, all effective leaders have power but not all powerful people are effective leaders.

***All effective leaders have power but not all
powerful people are effective leaders.***

Being an effective leader means you inherently have power: it comes with the territory whether the aim was to be powerful or not. Consider, for example, Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was an extremely effective leader who had no title of authority and never had a desire for power, but was very powerful nonetheless. He was endowed with power because he was an effective leader. Expressed differently, Gandhi inherited power through his leadership. Reviewing and reflecting upon his practices, Gandhi influenced people by use of the referent and expert bases (as previously discussed). He connected with people from all backgrounds, always displaying empathy and emotion. In turn, his followers truly revered him. In that respect, Gandhi proved the strength and longevity of these bases of power.

Next consider, in the alternative, Adolf Hitler. It is most difficult to transition from discussing Gandhi to examining Hitler as the end goals and individual motivations were so cataclysmically different. But that is why they are the perfect examples in this scenario. Unlike Gandhi, Hitler desired power and led through coercion, fear, and legitimate authority. Ultimately, however, Hitler's leadership reign lasted a little over a decade and suffered a terrible collapse and full reversal, while the effects of Gandhi's leadership continue post-mortem. This ties in the theory that people with dominance motivation use certain bases of power that end in short-term results. It also buttresses Collin's theory of company leaders who were not able to sustain long-term growth due to lack of humility and modesty.

In our respective working environments, we have met many powerful people who held a superior office, but were not effective leaders. As executive and leadership coach Dr. Christi Hegstad opined, ". . . leadership is a way of life while a boss only exists where their power does.... a boss exists within an organization, whereas a leader can lead at work, at home, at the grocery store and at all places in between" (*Forbes*, 2016). Hegstad asserts that a title does not necessarily create an effective leader. Unfortunately, in many organizations, certain individuals are given a leadership title for simply "doing their time" in a particular job title or at a particular place of business without any real thought as to whether that person achieved a place of respected authority. People ascend to this role, especially in the legal environment, because the hierarchical structure is strictly defined and adhered to (Associate to General Partner to Capital Partner).

Another reason that we hypothesize that power may be confused with leadership is the growing perception that leaders must exude a grandiose personality. In *Good to Great*, Collins states, "The great irony is that the animus and personal ambition that often drive people to positions of power stand at odds with the humility required for Level 5 leadership" (Collins, 2001). He expounds that all too often the board of directors and other owners will look for an individual with a "larger-than-life" or "egocentric" attitude to progress their organizations, where what they really need is a leader — someone who can demonstrate humility, modesty, and channel ambitions into transforming the company for the greater

good, not for personal gain (Collins, 2001). Collins essentially hits the nail on the head as to why not all powerful people can be effective leaders.

In the end, power is a tool that is available to every leader, but just because one possesses power does not mean an effective leader will materialize. When used correctly, power can be used to accomplish desired goals; however, when power is used for selfish reasons — to accomplish a personal goal or desire — or due to a leader's insecurities, it can wreak havoc on the organization and halt positive growth. Therefore, power is very temperamental for leaders and should be used carefully and thoughtfully.

How Power Can Render a Leader Ineffective

The Essential Tension Between Leadership and Power demonstrates the circumstances under which a person in a leadership role might use power for personal gain and thus negatively affect the organization (Mead, 2010). Maner and Mead (2010) began their study by highlighting the different motivations behind power, including dominance/personalized power and prestige/socialized power, both previously explored. As Maner and Mead stated, and as is our theory as well, “. . . power can be used either to benefit the self or to benefit the group” (Mead, 2010). We hypothesize that when a leader is motivated by self-gain, she or he is not an effective leader but is simply a person in power or occupying a position of delegated authority.

Maner and Mead predicted that leaders high in dominance motivation prioritize their own power over group goals when the power gap is threatened. They defined the power gap as the need for group members to relinquish some control to a leader who can achieve their goals making those group members vulnerable to exploitation (Mead, 2010). They predicted leaders low in dominance motivation would prioritize group goals rather than their own. They also hypothesized that leaders high in prestige motivation (characterized by displaying desirable traits and abilities that benefit the group) would be inclined to make decisions that benefited the group (Mead, 2010).

Maner and Mead next identified what threats exist to leader that could expose their self-interest and make them chose to use power in a way to further personal objectives. In that regard, they emphasized that “. . . most social structures have been marked by malleability, instability, and potential for change” (Mead, 2010). This instability threatens a leader. In turn, the leader begins to see other members as potential competitors and thus, subsequently engages in methods to protect the power already in place. The opposite is true for leaders in secure positions although it is very unlikely for a leader to be within a completely secure position unless it is a position with a term limit (Mead, 2010).

The first experiment focused on whether leaders would withhold information from other group members that would be considered valuable in performing a group task. The findings reflected a tendency for leaders high in dominance motivation to withhold information from other group members in an unstable leadership condition. By withholding information from the group, these leaders decreased the likelihood their group would perform well and thus receive commensurate rewards. There were no such effects on individuals low in dominance motivation or in participants' desire for prestige. They also found that leaders shared information freely when they were in stable and secure roles. In sum, when leadership was threatened, leaders motivated by dominance prioritized their own power over the group's performance and potential (Mead, 2010).

The second experiment focused on circumstances that would cause a leader to exclude a group member. What they found was that an unstable environment increased the tendency of a leader high in dominance motivation to exclude the high-scoring group member. This had no effect on participants low in dominance motivation. After this experiment, they polled the participants and nearly half of them indicated that they excluded the high-scoring group member in order to protect their power. In sum, they found that “[w]hen faced with a tradeoff between protecting their powerful role in the group and enhancing the group’s capacity for success, leaders high in dominance motivation prioritized their own power over group goals” (Mead, 2010).

Interestingly, in the third and fourth experiments, Maner and Mead tested the results of intergroup competition on a leader. What they found was that the presence of intergroup competition caused a high dominance leader to perceive the highly-skilled group member as an ally. Hence, the shift in competition from within the group to outside the group caused the high dominance-motivated leaders to shift their view on the group member from competitor to ally (Mead, 2010).

In the final experiment, participants were given the option to assign roles to various group members. They were informed that one particular group member was very skilled. Their findings were similar to experiments one and two: leaders high in dominance sought to reduce the threat to their power within the group and did not assign power roles to highly-skilled members. Faced with intergroup competition, however, leaders high in dominance motivation shifted focus and assigned a more authoritative role to the skilled worker (Mead, 2010).

These studies suggest that high dominance motivation leaders prioritize power over group goals. Second, the prioritizing of power over group goals was only present when a leader’s position was threatened or unstable. Finally, the introduction of intergroup competition caused a leader to shift priorities to boost a group’s success (Mead, 2010). Interpretatively, Maner and Mead insinuated that all leaders have power. They also highlighted the detrimental effect of power on a group when used for selfish reasons or when used by a leader who was not fit for the role (due to insecurities outweighing group needs).

Conclusion

In this article, we demonstrated that effective leadership and power are two separate and distinct concepts: power is a tool while effective leadership is a skill. Being an effective leader means that that individual is endowed with authority but the same is not true for powerful people: they are not always effective leaders. In order to sustain power, one must be an effective leader. Because leaders have power at their disposal, and power can either positively or negatively affect a group, the relationship between the two is extremely fragile. The success of an organization depends on the leader’s ability to balance the fragile relationship between power and leadership.

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About the Authors

Angela M. Jones, J.D., M.B.A. is a defense litigator licensed in Illinois and Indiana. She received her Juris Doctorate and Masters in Business Administration from Stetson University College of Law. Prior to that, she received a Bachelor of Science in Business Management and a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from the University of Central Florida. She began her studies in the Honors Psychology program at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Angela can be reached at Angela.Meyers20@gmail.com.

Sheri L. York is Certified Public Accountant licensed in New York and Illinois. She is currently servicing as Chief of Staff for the Chief Accountant at PwC's National Quality Organization.³ She has over 10 years of experience with PwC in public accounting, providing accounting, financial reporting, and auditing services. She received her Bachelor's in Accounting, Finance and International Business from Indiana University's Kelley School of Business. Sheri can be reached at Sheri.L.York@gmail.com.

³ PwC refers to the United States member firm, and may sometimes refer to the PwC network. Each member firm is a separate legal entity.