

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POWER CONCEPTS

The Academic Roots of the AIC approach

(Extract from Thesis 1983)

The Development Of Power Concepts

Several excellent summaries of the development of power theory already exist. Dahl (1968) provides an historical and philosophical review. Recently two colleagues P. Sachdeva and W. G. Astley (1981) provided a review of power theories in their synthesis of sources of intraorganizational power. What one concludes from a review of this literature is summed up by Jack H. Nagel 1975:

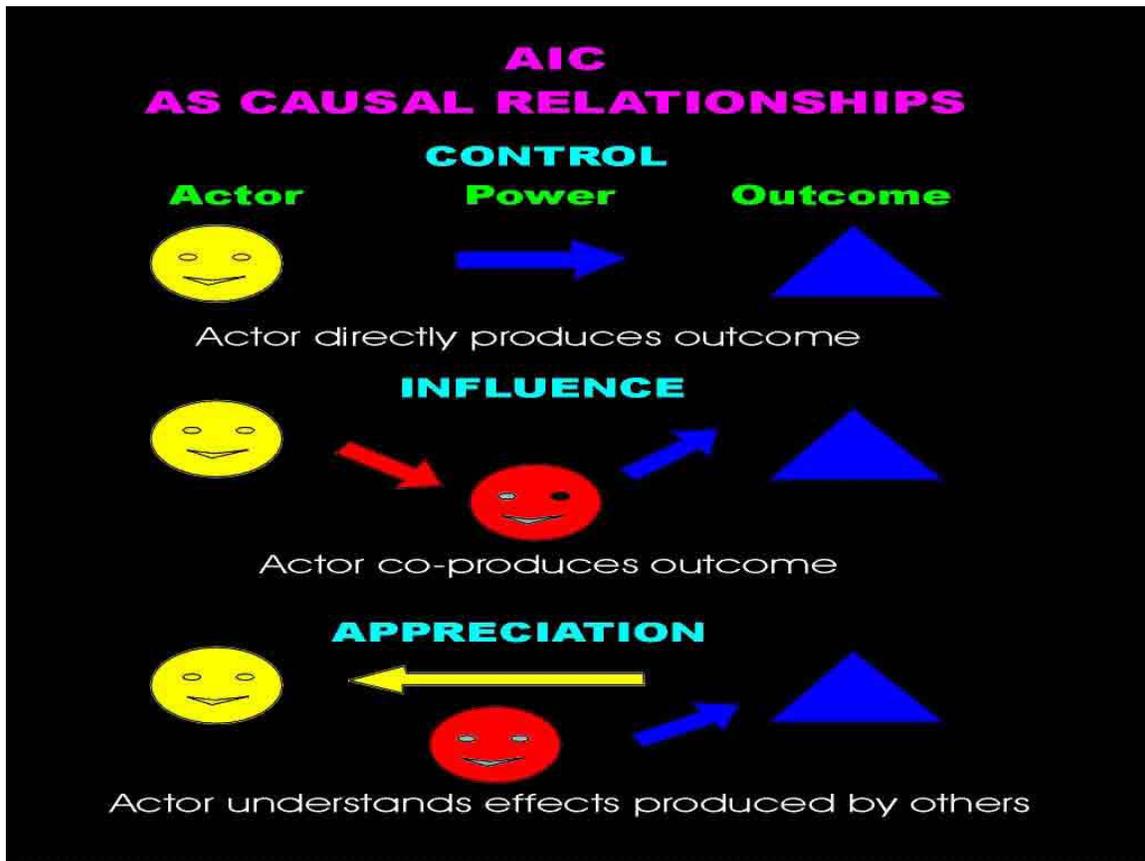
"We are not within shouting distance of an adequately complex theory. Indeed no one theory is likely to suffice"

"A power relation, actual or potential, is an actual or potential causal relation between the preferences of an actor regarding an outcome and the outcome itself."

The source of power, if we accept Simon and Nagel's approach, is the actor's preference in relation to an outcome. In order to link concepts of power to environmental theory, from which our concepts of *appreciation, influence, and control* are derived, we need to relate preference and outcomes to environmental relations. Fortunately, Ackoff and Emery have already done this (1972).

Firstly, outcome is described as a hierarchical construct, consisting of ends (immediate outcome), goals (intermediate), objectives (long-range), and ideals (ultimate). Preference is defined in terms of degree of intention or relative value in a choice environment. The environment, by definition, consists of variables that affect outcomes i.e. the state of the environment. Ackoff and Emery discuss the effect of these variables on outcomes in terms of "production". It is at this point that their concept of purposeful systems can be linked to concepts of power. The concept "producer-product" is seen as a special case of "cause-effect", just as Simon and followers see power as a special case of causal relations. Where the actor has a preference for an outcome that he can produce, then the relationship between variables (the power) is different in degree from a preference for an outcome that he can only co-produce, i.e. with the cooperation of others. The actor may also have preferences for outcomes that he can neither produce nor co-produce but which are subject to production by others. His preference in this case can be the cause of another action. This third type of relationship allows for causation or power without action by the source of the preference.

CHART 1 POWER AS CAUSALITY



It is these three distinct levels of relationship to "production" that correlate exactly with appreciation, influence and control. (See Chart 1) The different levels of production define the boundaries of different levels of environment. Thus what we had identified as three levels of environment, now became a much more generic concept; they became three degrees of power or three levels of causation.

- a) **Appreciation**- the weakest form of power, defines a relationship in which the focal actor understands and values the impact of events on the achievement of its preferred outcomes but can neither control nor influence them. He neither causes nor co-produces but reacts to ' these events.
- b) **Influence**- the second degree of power. Defines a relationship in which the focal actor is a co-producer rather than a producer of preferred outcomes. through influence he can increase the probability of preferred outcomes occurring.
- c) **Control**- the highest degree of power, defines a relationship in which the focal actor causes or produces preferred outcomes

directly. Controlled outcomes are those he can predict to occur with 100% reliability.

In every day language the process of using in the pursuit of purpose is called "politics". This led to a practical definition of politics as follows:

Politics is the use of power (appreciation, influence and control) by an actor in the pursuit of his own purposes. It is the process by which actors sort out and determine whose priority (preference) will prevail when their purposes (the outcomes they seek) are not mutually compatible.

The negative connotation of the word politics comes from the fact that it is linked to the achievement of the individual's "purpose" (social system) rather than the organization's "objectives" (technical system). The use of power, appreciation, influence and control, for the achievement of "objectives" is regarded as legitimate and does not carry the negative connotation. However, in all other senses, process, mechanisms, use, etc., the concepts of politics and use of power are identical. But now that we saw appreciation, influence and control as general causal relations, we could relate politics to the general map of organizational problems, and the set of correlative organization problem solving processes. The structure of both was based on relationships of appreciation, influence and control. Thus power and politics were not only additional variables that needed to be added to the organizational framework they were the variables that ordered all others.

When we returned to examine the elements of the framework we realized that we could make a significant addition. We could add the notion of a "political" system to those of the social and technical systems, and could also define three corresponding levels. From the perspective of a focal actor in the organization, a manager, we could define those elements of the political system, (the system for allocating power) which are subject to appreciation, influence and control.

Leadership: I relied on Selznick's (1957) identification of leadership as the primary means of power allocation between the institution and its environment. It is through "integrity" i.e. integration of purpose, social and Institutional that a balance of power between society and organizational needs are maintained. It is the leader who is responsible for the relationship between his organization and its environment. From the manager's perspective "leadership" is subject only to appreciation, in the planning period, because it is assumed as a given that will remain constant during that period.

Authority: The second level of power allocation would appear to be authority. By this I mean that power is allocated by giving members of the organization different areas of responsibility, the area carries with it sanctioned uses of power i.e. from the technical system, but in addition the person occupying the role brings with him additional sources of authority based on the social system, his own purposes, other roles in society and his differential competencies and

skills. From the manager's perspective authority relationships are seen as subject only to influence, in the planning period. He may not be able to change the structure of authority relations, but he can increase or decrease his own authority and that of others through manipulation of information and through his own personality and social role.

Control of resources: The third level allocates power through control of resources. Resources, in this sense, refers to all the resources allocated as part of the technical system, staff, funds, information, but also includes any resources available through the social system access to special skills, information, privileges, facilities, etc. From the manager's point of view, these are his only sources of control during the planning period.

We distinguished the elements of the political system from those of the political process. Leadership, authority and control of resources, were the outcomes of a political process, which paralleled the elements of the social and technical systems outlined in Chapter 2. The political process would have counterparts to the levels of the planning and learning processes:

- a) Diplomacy, we defined as the appreciative political process, it involves understanding and valuing the purposes of others.
- b) Negotiation, we defined as the influence process, it involved bargaining and transacting for desired outcomes.
- c) Agreement/Disagreement we defined as the controlled element, however, we recognized that this level of the political process entailed any process of conflict resolution, including the most violent forms of disagreement, fighting and war

We were now at a stage where we had conceptually solved the major problem of the research program; how to incorporate "politics" into the more rational analyses usually incorporated into studies of organization and management.

Summary

In terms of development of the conceptual framework, a significant step forward was made in defining environmental relations as causal or power relations. Thus the variable of "politics" we originally wanted to add to the implicit framework used in the projects reviewed, now became the primary ordering variable. The concept of power we adopted at this point in the research consisted of three parts:

- a) The purpose of an actor, which is defined by the priority or relative value he has for an outcome in the situation.

b) The nature of the relationship between his purpose and the intervening variables i.e. the means of "production", which we define as degrees of power; appreciation, influence and control,

c) The amount of power, which is the sum of the actor's appreciation, influence and control over variables affecting the production of, preferred outcomes.

The process of organizing was now seen as a process of gaining power over variables that affect the achievement of purpose. It involved a movement from appreciation to influence and control.

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