Facilitative Leadership: An Exercise of Influence

By: Jane Humphries

Whether you are at the novice, capable, or master level of leading others, you may frequently find yourself wondering, "How do I best use my power to lead and also empower those around me?" When you work daily with dedicated staff, or have a goal to have dedicated staff, your overall use of your position's power is often times a "make or break" reality for empowering others. So, how can you reflect upon your power and its use by being a facilitative leader? Let's find out with an overview of the sources of power and faciliative leadership as described by Paula Jorde Bloom in her book, *Leadership in Action: How Effective Directors Get Things Done*.

Authority and power are concepts early childhood leaders can't ignore. Being clear about your own management philosophy as it relates to these issues will help you to better understand the difference between terms like *authoritarian* and *authoritative*, *cooperation* and *collaboration*, and *patronizing* and *empowering*. Put simply, how you view yourself as the person in charge impacts the interpersonal dynamics every day in your early childhood program.

SOURCES OF POWER

Power is a dynamic that exists in all adult/child and adult/adult relationships. It is the ability to get others to do what you want them to do. In its simplest form, we can think of power as control, authority, or dominance *over* another individual or as sharing authority and responsibility *with* another person. So, the central question is not "Will power be used?" but rather "How can power be used wisely?" How can it be used to engage, guide, and support staff in the pursuit of common goals?

The concept of power can be further understood by exploring the reasons that prompt individuals to comply with requests, requirements, or demands from others. Early childhood leaders derive power from personal as well as organizational sources. The following summarizes the five kinds of power that are at play in all types of organizations, including early care and education programs, and can be grouped into two broad categories—organizational and personal.

The different kinds of power based on the work of French & Raven (1959) are as follows:

Revised: 11/1/2018

ORGANIZATIONAL

- **Reward power** is the early childhood leader's ability to influence staff by rewarding desired behavior. This includes the extent to which the leader controls teaching schedules, classroom assignments, and routine housekeeping duties. They have reward power over staff. In many programs, staff comply with a program director's request because they expect to be rewarded for compliance—the leader has established a quid pro quo relationship. In some programs, reward power is openly promoted through bonus or merit performance systems.

- **Coercive power** is essentially the flip side of reward power. Program leaders have the ability to influence staff by punishing them for undesirable behavior. Punishment can be in the form of a reprimand, undesirable work assignments, closer supervision, or even termination. Punishment can also be viewed as the absence of rewards or resources.

- **Legitimate power** is an individual's ability to influence behavior simply because of the formal authority accorded to the position. In most organizations, employees readily accept that individuals in certain positions on the organizational chart have the right to make decisions and issue directives and that employees have an obligation to comply. Authority exercised through legitimate power is often expressed as orders, commands, directives, or instructions.

PERSONAL

- **Expert power** is a leader's ability to influence others because of his or her credentials and specialized knowledge and skill. Staff believe that the leader possesses knowledge and skills they do not have, so they willingly follow the program leader.

- **Referent power** is based on the staff's respect and admiration for the leader. Staff identify with the program leader because of his or her personality and interpersonal skills. The program leader is perceived as a role model to be emulated, and staff comply with requests because they respect the values and principles for which the program leader stands. Overall, reward, coercive, and legitimate power are bound to the position in the organization. So, the greater the authority attached to a position, the greater the potential for use of these types of power. In contrast, expert and referent power depend more on the personal attributes of the individual, such as personality, leadership style, knowledge, integrity, and interpersonal behavior. These types of power do not depend on occupying a formal position.

Adapted from French, J.R., P., Jr., & Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Carwright (Ed.). *Studies in social power* (pp. 150-167). Oxford, England: Univer. Michigan.

Revised: 11/1/2018

McCORMICK CENTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP │ AT NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY
6200 Capitol Drive │ Wheeling, IL 60090 │ McCormickCenter.nl.edu

As you reflect on the use of different types of power in your program, consider the outcomes of each approach as they relate to your employees' behavior:

- The use of reward power, so commonplace in organizations, promotes compliance with specific rules or requests. Over time, however, employees may perceive reward power as manipulative. When misused, reward power can result in competition among staff, thus undermining your efforts to establish norms of collaboration.

- Although coercive power yields short-term compliance, over time it results in resentment and alienation of staff. Staff who quit without notice or walk off with a year's supply of classroom materials are often retaliating in response to coercive power.

- Legitimate power, like reward power, promotes compliance, but it seldom motivates staff to long-term commitment to a program.

- Expert power can move employees beyond mere compliance to deeper levels of commitment if they perceive that the knowledge and skill of the program leader (or other authority figures in the program) are essential in promoting their well-being.

- Referent power is the type of power most likely to promote long-term commitment to an early childhood program, particularly if staff identify with and admire the values and principles of the program leader or other leaders in the center.

Power need not be thought of as a negative or constraining force in early childhood organizations. In fact, by being aware of the power dynamics at play in programs, program leaders can become more cognizant of how they might put power to good use to energize and empower staff. *This requires a paradigm shift from thinking about power over others to thinking about power with others through facilitative leadership*.

FACILITATIVE LEADERSHIP

Empowerment is the process through which program leaders share their legitimate authority and power, helping others use it in constructive ways to make decisions affecting themselves and their work. Empowerment happens when staff are helped to find greater meaning in their work, to meet higher level needs through their work, and to develop enhanced personal and professional capacities. This form of power is unlimited and can create the foundation for facilitative leadership.

Rethinking personal conceptions of power and moving to a model of facilitative leadership means rethinking the specifics of how you can create partnerships in every facet of the early childhood program's operations. It means finding ways to give a greater voice to staff on issues that affect them every day— allocation of educational resources, curriculum, and scheduling. Program leaders who view themselves as facilitative leaders think about ways they can help individuals and groups in the program environment to

Revised: 11/1/2018

reflect on and improve the processes they use to solve problems and make decisions. In other words, facilitative leaders help others learn how to learn. They understand that while rewards and external controls generate compliance, it is the staff's internal sense of mastery, accomplishment, and validation that generate their long-term commitment to an early childhood program.

Facilitative leadership is a reciprocal process between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. It is not something that is done to people, but rather working with and through other people to achieve organizational goals. Trust is essential for this kind of leadership. Staff need to believe that you, the program leader, are operating in their best interest, not out of self-interest. Facilitative leaders exemplify the qualities of competence, connection, and character. They understand that leadership is not about being in charge but about serving and supporting others. It is about compassion and the day-to-day practice of social justice in a caring community.

One resource to explore these concepts and ideas of enhancing leadership's influence is the McCormick Center's online module, *Leading the Way*, which is based on Paula Jorde Bloom's *Leadership in Action: How Effective Directors Get Things Done (2014)*. This module is part of our online national director credential, Aim4Excellence™. You can learn more about the credential on our website, or directly access the *Leading the Way* module here.

Dr. Jane Humphries serves as a Professional eLearning Specialist for the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University. She has written curriculum and facilitated online learning in graduate and undergraduate level courses since 2004. She is currently the curriculum developer of the Aim4Excellence™ program, an online National Director Credential recognized by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation and several states' quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS).

Bloom, P.J. (2014). *Leadership in action: How effective directors get things done* (2nd ed.). Lake Forest, IL: New Horizons. Reprinted with

Revised: 11/1/2018

permission from the author. This document may be printed, photocopied, and disseminated freely with attribution.

Revised: 11/1/2018