Leadership and Power Base Development:
Using Power Effectively to Manage Diversity and Job-Related Interdependence in Complex Organizations

Barton J. Michelson

Mention the word *power* and what comes to mind? Power is evil, corrupt, self-serving, manipulative, hurtful, and possibly "America's last dirty word."[1] These words speak to the dark side of power. There is, however, a positive face to addressing power acquisition, power-base development, and power use. The purpose of this article is to consider power as a positive force that is continually used to achieve organizational, group, and individual goals. When power is used in an ethical and purposeful way, there is nothing evil about it.

This paper posits that leadership is the exercise of power; and, therefore, leaders must develop appropriate organizational power bases to use effectively their power to influence others. A power-base development model is constructed to show various deployments of power. This model establishes an interactive link between a leader's power base and alternative influence strategies that produce positive power dynamics. The significance of this proposed model is that it accentuates the leadership role in developing positive organizational and interpersonal relationships that are predicated on the employment of certain known power bases in an organization. The power dynamics described in this model apply to all organizations regardless of size, goal, mission, technology, and so forth.

The structure of the model is fashioned from a review of recognized and accepted literature on power theory, power-base formation, leadership, and organizational dynamics. The works of John Kotter, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, David A. Whetton, and Kim S. Cameron were invaluable in constructing an expanded model that displays both the dependent and interdependent relationships considered critical to power acquisition, power transformations, power dynamics, and organization effectiveness. The model's design will permit

Dr. Barton J. Michelson is director of executive assessment and development and professor of leadership and management at the Air War College of Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. He received a bachelor's degree in international studies, a master's in political science, and a doctorate in administration from Ohio State University. He is also a graduate from the Federal Aviation Administration Executive School. Dr. Michelson is a management and training consultant.

the reader to examine both positive and negative power outcomes and provide an accelerated dramatization of known power relationships in complex organizations.

Leadership and Power

Power obviously is a pervasive reality in the life process of all modern-day organizations. Leaders regularly acquire and use power to accomplish specific work goals and to strengthen their own positions vis-à-vis the reading of general or organizational goals. It is possible to see every interaction and every social relationship in an organization as involving an exercise of power.[2] Thus, in the context of this paper, the word *leadership* will be used to mean "the process of using power to obtain interpersonal influence."[3] The question then arises, why must leaders achieve success at influencing the behavior of other people at work? Because, as Harry Truman succinctly stated, "Leadership is the ability to get men to do what they don't want to do and like it."[4] In short, the core problem for leaders in any organization involves getting others to do what is required to accomplish the organization's goals.[5] There are a number of other reasons to explain why leaders pursue power and view it as an important part of their work. In a general sense, power acquisition and power use can have an impact on career progress, on job performance, on organizational effectiveness, and on the lives of numerous people.[6] More specifically, the nature of work in today's complex organizations requires that we become more enlightened with respect to issues of leadership, power, and influence. John Kotter, writing in *Power and Influence Beyond Formal Authority,* states: "We can make rigid bureaucracies more flexible, innovative, and adaptive. We can even make the world of work more exciting and personally satisfying for most people."[7] Kotter believes that in today's complex organizations, the concept of using formal power (that is, legitimate authority) as a sole source of influencing behavior to make organizations more competitive, responsive, and responsible is outmoded.[8]

Leaders today work in socially intricate organizations where they need the assistance not only of subordinates but also of peers, superiors, and external parties to accomplish their goals. Accomplishing goals that positively impact the

organization requires effective leadership linked to strong power bases and workable influence strategies. Building a strong power base and developing effective influence strategies to produce power dynamics is an important leadership challenge.

The Leadership Challenge

The social milieu of large and complex organizations can be characterized as highly diverse, highly interdependent, and rich in opportunities to generate power dynamics. The first characteristic, diversity, pertains to differences among organization members with respect to goals, values, outcomes, assumptions, and perceptions. Interdependence relates to the situation in which multiple actors have power over each other due to job-related interdependence. In the literature, for instance, Kotter summarizes the logic of how high levels of diversity and interdependence set the stage for power acquisition, power base development, and the use of influence to create power dynamics. He writes

> . . . when a high degree of interdependence exists in the workplace, unilateral action is rarely possible. For all decisions of any significance, many people will be in a position to retard, block, or sabotage action because they have some power over the situation.[9]

He concludes by indicating:

> The greater the diversity, and the greater the interdependence the more differences of power there will be. Because of the interdependence, people will not be able to resolve these differences either by edict or by walking away. As a result, high levels of diversity and interdependence in the workplace are quite naturally linked to conflicting opinions about action and thereby influence attempts to resolve that conflict.[10]

Thus, the leadership challenge becomes one of making diversity and interdependence work for organizational success. Whether the organization is private or public not-for-profit, the challenge is similar.

Managing Diversity, Interdependence, and Power Dynamics

The nature of the leadership challenge, therefore, is clear. High diversity and high job-related interdependence often produce conflict. Leaders cannot simply ignore the conflict; they must attempt to influence factors to resolve it. Managing conflict when its roots are buried deeply in complex diversity and job-related interdependence requires a sense of power and influence strategies that can only be skillfully developed. Once developed, one can produce effective and responsible power dynamics. The power that leaders need to produce these dynamics comes from numerous sources and multiple bases. Building such a power base is not easy. It takes time, energy, and management.

Exactly how do effective leaders build a strong power base? How do effective leaders transform power into influence? What specific steps do effective leaders take to avoid abuses of influence? How do effective leaders sustain and maintain power over time?

Power Acquisition

The foundation of a strong power base starts with a leader's individual power. As figure 5 indicates, leaders derive power from both position and personal sources.
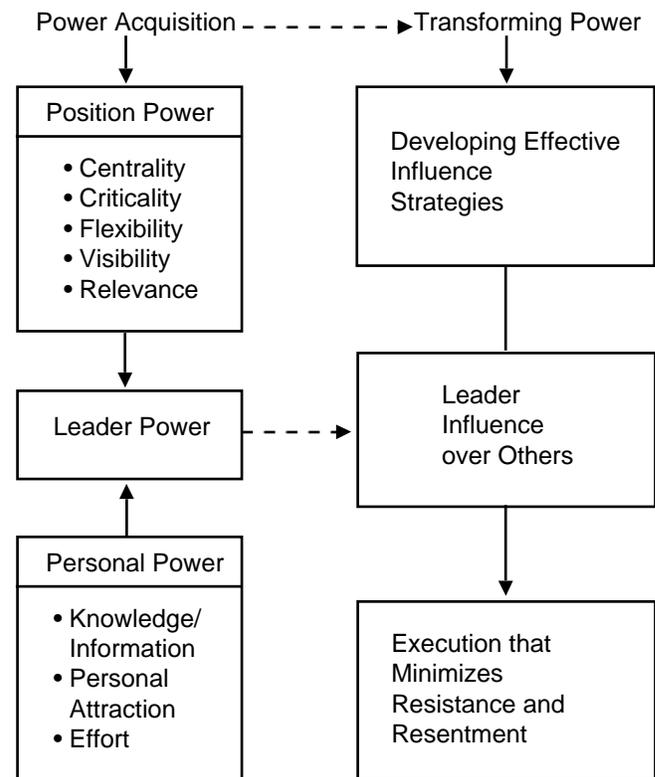

Figure 5. Leadership: The Exercise of Power

Position Power

Five key factors have the ability to foster power in a leadership position. Centrality, criticality, flexibility, visibility, and relevance stimulate power acquisition by horizontal expansion or maneuvering. The power potential is based on lateral relationships between positions and organization activities. Each factor is described in table 5.

Acquiring or increasing leader position power happens when the key factors are used in the following manner:[11]

Centrality/Criticality. You secure a more central role in the work flow, influence the flow of information through you, structure elements of your job responsibilities in a unique way, expand your communication network both intra- and interorganizationally and maintain your office near the main traffic flow.

Flexibility. You enrich your job by eliminating routine activities, increasing task variety, generating novel ideas,

Table 5

Factors Increasing Position Power

Factor	Description
Centrality	Relationship between positions in a communication network
Criticality	Relationship between tasks performed in a work flow process
Flexibility	Amount of discretion vested in a position
Visibility	Degree to which task performance is seen by influentials in the organization
Relevance	Relationship between a task and organizational priorities

initiating innovative projects, getting involved at the outset of the decision-making process, and avoiding standardized performance criteria for job success.

Visibility. You increase the number of interactions you have with senior people, making important oral presentations, participating on problem-solving teams, publicizing accomplishments in the right places, and taking advantage of opportunities to enhance personal name recognition.

Relevance. You have the opportunity to acquire or develop internal or external boundary-spanning roles. Boundary-spanning roles are defined as providing services and information to other work units, monitoring and assessing activities intra- and interorganizationally. Other areas that increase relevance relate to getting involved in decision making pertaining to priority goal setting and assuming a socialization role for new work-unit members.

Personal Power

Three personal attributes are associated with building personal power: knowledge/information, personal attraction, and effort.[12] These are the characteristics you bring to the organization.

Knowledge and Information. Leader power can be increased through expertise acquired by possession of special knowledge and information. Access to key people and data sources also enhances power potential.

Personal Attraction. Agreeable behavior, pleasant personality characteristics, and attractive personal appearance are referents that attract people to a leader.

Effort. A leader's capacity to demonstrate a high level of effort can be parlayed into increased expertise and personal attraction. Working hard on priority assignments may enhance visibility with superiors and set in motion other dynamics associated with position power.

Transforming Power

Position power and personal power are the building blocks upon which a leader has the potential to use power.

The first stage of our model leader power represents power at rest; the second stage transforms power into influence to achieve desired results. Influence involves securing the consent of others to assist, collaborate, and work with you in achieving an objective.[13] Influence also entails any act or potential activity that affects the behavior of another person, group, or set of organizational entities.[14] Transforming power into successful influence requires the development of an influence strategy that minimizes resistance, resentment, and potential abuse.

A leader must maintain perspective in terms of targeting power to achieve successful influence. Possessing a potentially strong power base to use power is worth little unless you are able to secure compliance, effort, and commitment from others.

Developing Strategies of Influence

There are numerous ways of exercising influence. Several studies suggest that influence strategies can be classified into three broad categories: retribution, reciprocity, and reason (table 6).[15] David Kipnis and others have developed several general strategies of leader influence.[16] They list the most to least popular strategies found in their three-nation study of managerial influence styles as shown in table 7. Another researcher, Gary A. Yuki, lists 11 forms of influence and a summary of leader and target-person requirements for each strategy.[17] Table 8 identifies the different forms of influence.

The research on influence strategies indicates that each approach listed in the classifications has advantages and limitations. Effective leaders generally use combinations of various strategies for different purposes and under different conditions. The challenge of complex organization diversity and job-related interdependence requires a leader to select the proper influence strategy to produce positive power dynamics. Leaders should avoid the pitfall of overreliance on and overuse of a particular influence strategy. Excessive use of an influence strategy could lead to abuses of influence that may provoke resistance leading to diminished leader influence over time. It is important to maintain a balanced perception between the leader's power and the target persons to be influenced. You do not want to place the target persons in the position of perceived helplessness or feeling abused, exploited, or manipulated against their will. Leaders should create power dynamics to secure the commitments necessary to achieve important organizational goals and objectives. Unbridled use of power and influence generally produce negative power dynamics that are self-defeating for all concerned. Positive power dynamics shown in figures 6 and 7 contribute to managing diversity and opportunities to cope with job-related interdependence.[18]

Table 6

Influence Strategies

Category	Indirect Approach	Direct Approach
Rely on fear of retribution	Intimidation (demand)	Coercion (threaten)
Involve norms of reciprocity	Ingratiation (obligation)	Bargaining (exchange)
Use persuasive arguments based on reason	Appeal to personal values (apply general principles)	Present facts (stress, immediate need)

Source: David A. Whetten and Kim S. Cameron, *Developing Managerial Skills* (Glenview, Ill. Scott Foresman, 1984), 267.

Table 7

Most-to-Least Popular Strategies Used in All Countries

	When Managers Influenced Superiors	When Managers Influenced Subordinates
Most Popular to Least Popular	Reason Coalition Friendliness Bargaining Assertiveness Higher Authority	Reason Assertiveness Friendliness Evaluation Bargaining High Authority Sanction

Source: David Kipnis et al., "Patterns of Managerial Influence: Shotgun Managers, Tacticians, and Bystanders," *Organizational Dynamics* 12, no. 3 (New York: American Management Association, 1984), 62.

Table 8

Different Forms of Influence

Form of Influence	Agent Requirements	Target Person Requirements
1. Legitimate Request	Legitimate Justification	Relevant Values
2. Instrumental Compliance	Control over Rewards; Credibility of Promise	Relevant Needs, Openness to Manipulation
3. Coercion	Control over Punishments; Credibility of Threat	Fear, Openness to Intimidation
4. Rational Persuasion	Insight; Technical Expertise; Credibility	Relevant Values and Need
5. Rational Faith	Technical Expertise; Credibility	Low Expertise, Relevant Need; Trust of Agent
6. Inspirational Appeal	Insight into Values and Beliefs; Persuasive Ability	Relevant Values and Beliefs
7. Indoctrination	Control of Social Situation; Relevant Skills	Alienation, Relevant Needs
8. Information Distortion	Credibility as Information Source	Use of Information for Impression Formation and Decision Making
9. Situational Engineering	Control of Relevant Aspects of Situation	Willingness to Accept Situation
10. Personal Identification	Attractiveness, Charisma	Admiration of Agent
11. Decision Identification	Willingness to Allow Participation; Relevant Skills	Desire to Participate; Goals Consistent with Agent Goals

Positive Power Dynamics

The proper selection and use of an influence strategy transforms leader influence into behavioral dynamics that produce inventive thinking, creative problem solving, and the development of new prototypes, products, and services. Positive power dynamics enhances organization competitiveness, increases organization adaptability and responsiveness, and ultimately increases synergy under organization conditions of

high diversity and job-related interdependence. Later, increases in organization synergy permit an organization to improve performance levels related to goal attainment and mission accomplishment. Thus, leader power and influence produce the dynamics that optimize results that in turn generate the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

Negative Power Dynamics

Figures 6 and 7 also indicate that leader influence can produce negative behavioral dynamics. This model confirms that power abuse is a reality in complex organizations of high diversity and job-related interdependence. Oftentimes leader influence simply fails or is used for personal self-aggrandizement. This kind of failure of leader power can lead to prolonged power struggles and intraorganizational/interorganizational warfare. Protracted power struggles, bureaucratic infighting, and parochial politics then produce myopic organization outcomes that increase inefficiency, elevate human/nonhuman costs, produce diminished innovative capabilities, and increase vertical and horizontal conflicts that cul-

minate with entropy and the probable and eventual deterioration of the social fabric of the organization.[19]

Organization Effectiveness

The picture of organizational life depicted in our model of leader power and influence suggests a complex social environment of confrontation, struggle, manipulation, hostility, and battle. It also projects a fundamental reality found in contemporary complex organizations. The nature of work, work processes, goal setting, and decision making is grounded in high diversity and job-related interdependence. The achievement of organization effectiveness that then produces excellence is almost impossible without leader excellence. Excellence in leadership can be attributed to how effectively a leader acquires and exercises power to produce positive power dynamics that in turn impacts the organization over the long run. The social milieu described in figure 8 creates exciting challenges to the leader, who must constantly exercise power to produce organization excellence. The leader in this environment recognizes that excellence requires much more than
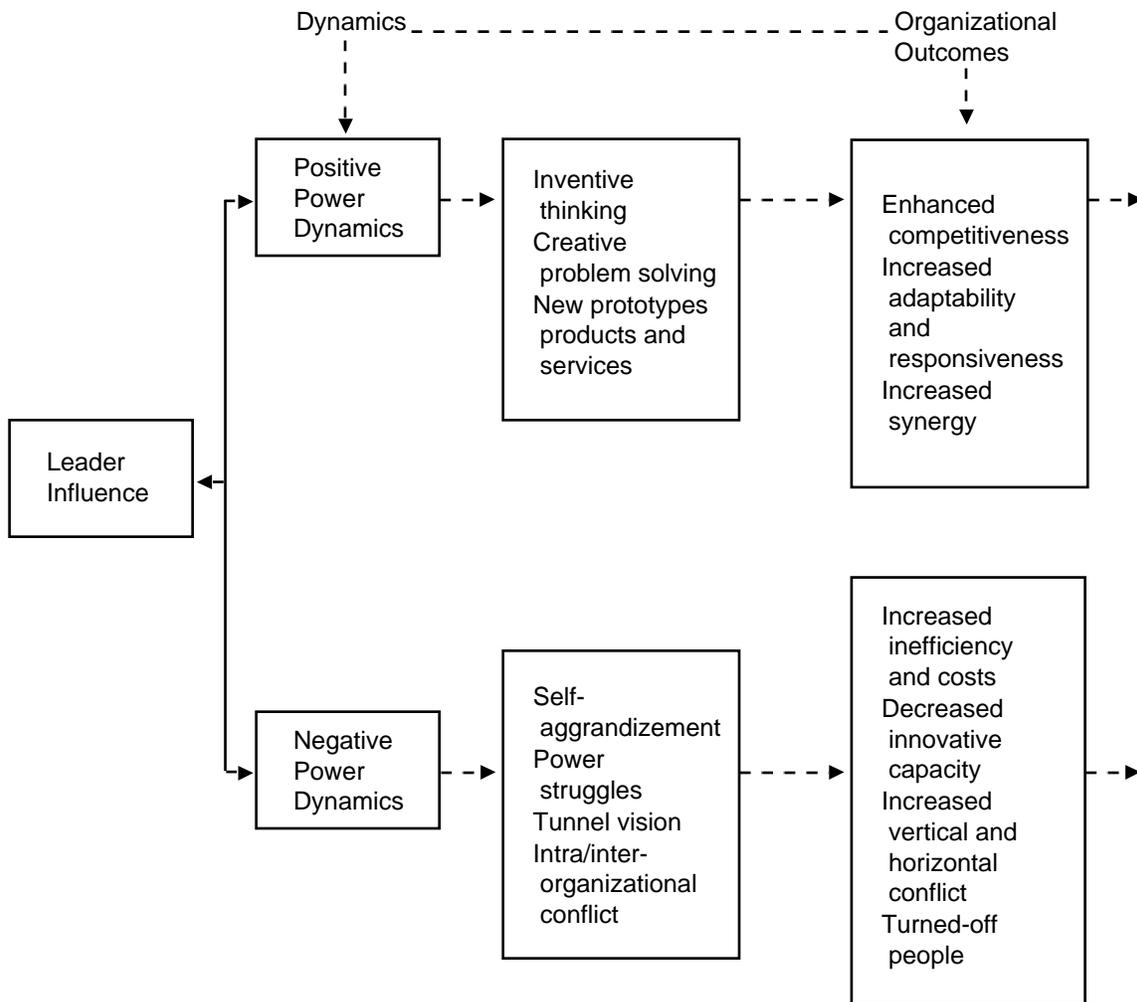

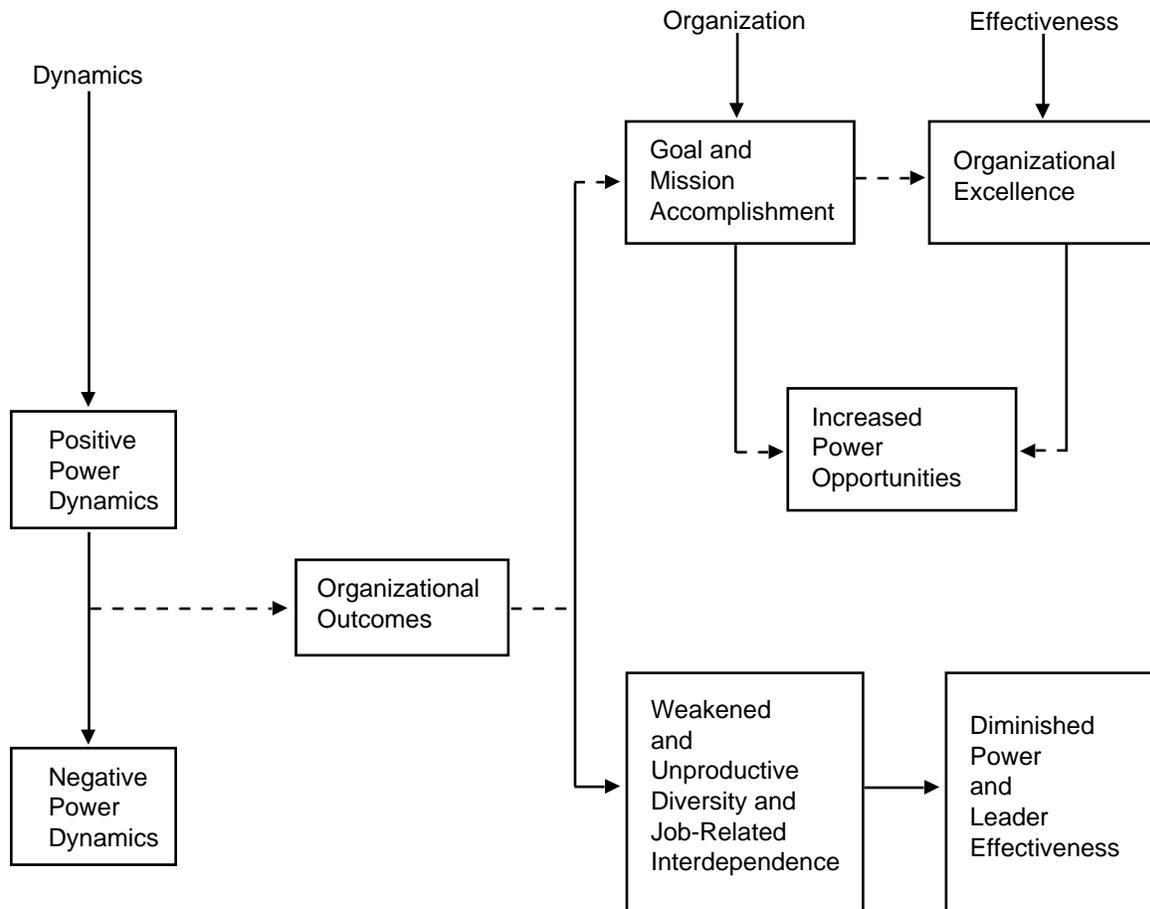**Figure 6. Leadership: The Exercise of Power**
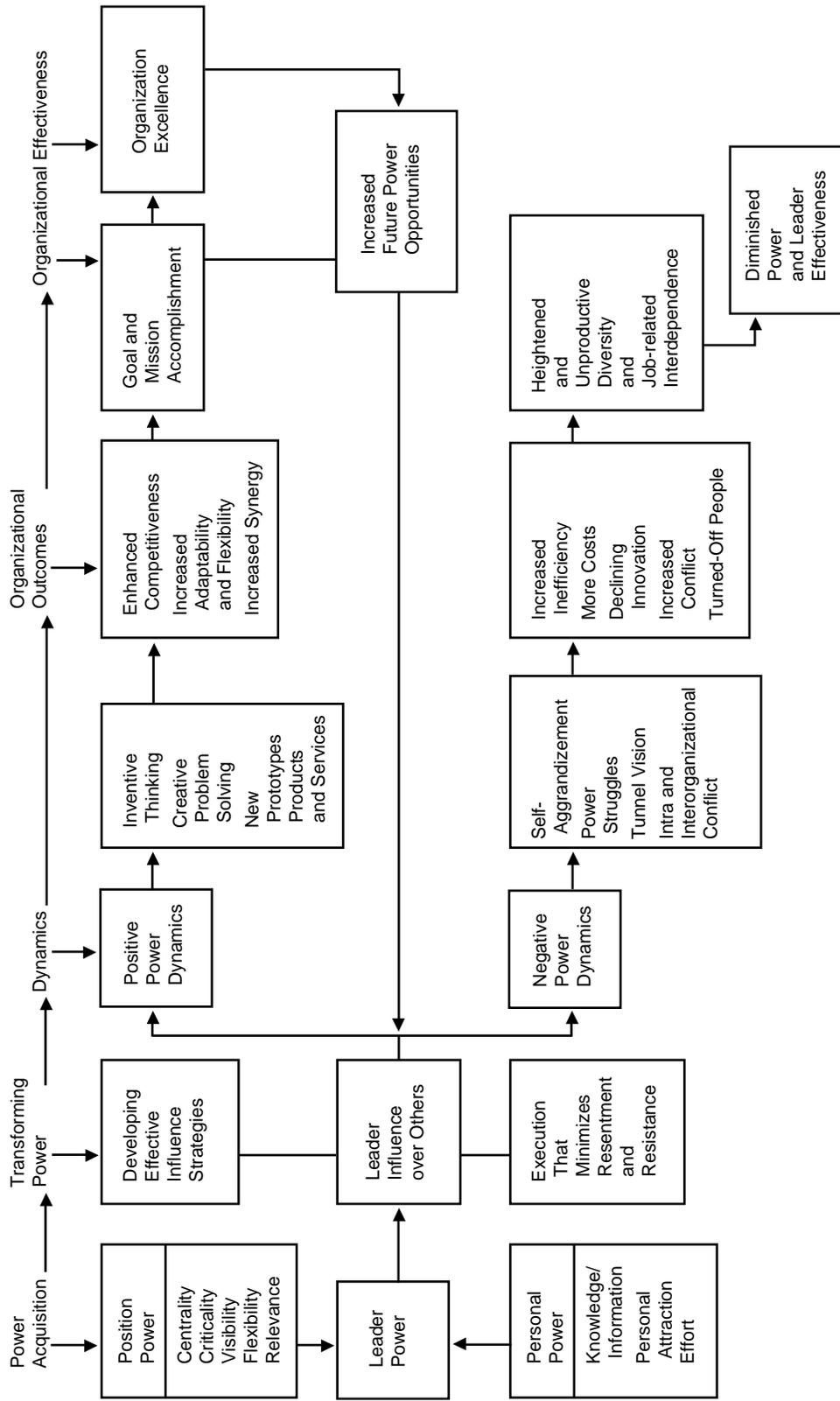
197

Figure 7. Leadership: The Exercise of Power

technical competence. It demands a different context for managing social reality; and it necessitates power skills that can mobilize diverse people who are linked together through interdependence and a common need to pull together for meaningful purposes despite the many multiple countervailing forces working against that synergy.

In conclusion, the presentation of this model suggests that if leaders are to cope and prosper under the conditions of high diversity and job-related interdependence, it is essential that they develop effective power bases and influence strategies to make social complexity work for them. Success translates into stronger power bases with greater opportunities to lead through the exercise of power. Power misuse and abuse consistently lead to heightened and unproductive diversity and strain job-related interdependence that results in counterproductive power struggles. The end result of negative power dynamics is a general diminished power-base opportunity and specifically leader ineffectiveness.

Notes

1. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Power Failure in Management Circuits," *Harvard Business Review,* July–August 1979, 65.

2. James L. Gibson, John M. Ivancevich, and James H. Donnelly Jr., *Organizations: Behavior, Structure, Processes* (Plano, Tex.: Business Publications, Inc., 1985), 333.

3. John R. Schermerhorn Jr., James G. Hunt, and Richard N. Osborn, *Managing Organizational Behavior* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1985), 445.

4. Allan R. Cohen et al., *Effective Behavior in Organizations* (Homewood, Ill.: Irwin, 1984), 310.

5. Ibid., 301.

6. John P. Kotter, *Power in Management* (New York: AMACOM, 1979), 1.

7. John P. Kotter, *Power and Influence Beyond Formal Authority* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 3.

8. Ibid., 11.

9. Ibid., 18.

10. Ibid.

11. David A. Whetten and Kim S. Cameron, *Developing Management Skills* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman, 1984), 259.

12. Schermerhorn, 456.

13. Cohen et al., 311.

14. Ibid., 310.

15. Whetten and Cameron, 267.

16. David Kipnis et al., "Patterns of Managerial Influence: Shotgun Managers, Tacticians, and Bystanders," *Organizational Dynamics,* Winter 1984, 62.

17. Gary A. Yuki, *Leadership in Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1981), 11.

18. Kotter, *Power and Influence,* 36.

19. Ibid., 20–21.

Organizational Effectiveness

Organizational Outcomes

Dynamics

Transforming Power

Power Acquisition

Organization Excellence

Goal and Mission Accomplishment

Increased Future Power Opportunities

Enhanced Competitiveness
Increased Adaptability and Flexibility
Increased Synergy

Inventive Thinking
Creative Problem Solving
New Prototypes Products and Services

Positive Power Dynamics

Developing Effective Influence Strategies

Position Power
Centrality
Criticality
Visibility
Flexibility
Relevance

Leader Power

Leader Influence over Others

Personal Power
Knowledge/Information
Personal Attraction
Effort

Execution That Minimizes Resentment and Resistance

Negative Power Dynamics

Self-Aggrandizement
Power Struggles
Tunnel Vision
Intra and Interorganizational Conflict

Increased Inefficiency
More Costs
Declining Innovation
Increased Conflict
Turned-Off People

Heightened and Unproductive Diversity and Job-related Interdependence

Diminished Power and Leader Effectiveness

Figure 8. Leadership: The Exercise of Power