

# Interpersonal Communication Application to Leadership

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## INTRODUCTION

Communication and interpersonal communication are simultaneously complex and ubiquitous. However, interpersonal communication fosters positive relationships of any kind (e.g., friends, family, and colleagues). Without it or its lack thereof, will result in poor morale, dissatisfaction, distrust, and will cause a relationship to weaken and deteriorate over time. For any organization to operate efficiently, effective communication is critical regardless of the size and industry. If the necessary information or messages are not thoroughly conveyed, misunderstandings are likely to arise. Poor communication can lead to costly mistakes, impede development, hinder change, and fuel distrust.

This chapter asserts that an interpersonal communication approach to effective leadership practices helps develop and sustain quality work-relationships. A high level of interpersonal communication supports social responsibility, cooperation, an ethic of care, climate of trust, supportiveness, and an open and free exchange of ideas. We rely on Abraham Maslow's (1959) third step within the Hierarchy of Needs model – love and belonging -- to understand the social need that motivates human behavior. Maslow's states that human needs are met when people have experienced a high level of self-actualization. This includes, but is not limited to a sense of acceptance, affection, belongingness, safety, security, respect, confidence, and competency just to mention a few. In situations involving interactions with others, there are socio-psychology and emotional connections within the social stage that speak directly to interpersonal activity.

For decades, scholars have extensively offered theoretical research regarding leadership traits, behaviors, characteristics, types, and styles (e.g., approaches). And while the evolution of leadership elements will continually to be studied by many practitioners, we know that the importance of communication is critical to the application of effective leadership.

## BACKGROUND

### Practical Approaches to Leadership

Leadership is complex with multiple dimensions. Lewis, Goodman and Fandt (1995) define leadership as “a social influence process that involves determining a group's objectives, motivating behavior to achieve those objectives and influencing group maintenance and culture”. Because of its complexity, the study of leadership will persist, as many practitioners will continue to conceptualize and redefine leadership. According to Northouse (2013) leadership involves *influence* and a *process*, and rather than confining leadership to specific elements, Northouse (2013) identifies dimensions of leadership (p. 5):



- Leadership is a process,
- Leadership involves influence,
- Leadership occurs in groups,
- Leadership involves common goals.

The process can be described as an interactive exchange between leader and follower. Leadership depends on influence and followers; without neither, leadership doesn't exist.

Another component of leadership is power. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1979) declares that “power is America's last dirty word. It is easier to talk about money—and much easier to talk about sex—than it is to talk about power” (Jang, Ott, & Shafriz, 2011, p. 271). Theorists have defined power in terms of getting others to do what one wants to have done despite followers' resistance (Dahl, 1957; Emerson, 1962; Kipnis, 1976; Pfeffer, 1981; Weber, 1947). Power is viewed as neither good nor bad, however the use or applicability of power will dictate its course. Conspicuously, power is a critical element to leadership. When one has the ability to affect others' thoughts, ideas, feelings, emotions, motives, attitudes, behaviors, and actions, the capacity of this social influence derives from two major kinds of power: *position power* and *personal power* (Kotter, 1990).

- *Personal power* exists when followers presume leaders to be both intellectual and amiable. Because a minister or coach has the potential to influence and effect change, followers that reconciled with the leader's beliefs or practices represent a leader's personal power.
- *Position power* is power facilitated through a formal organizational hierarchical system. From this standpoint, power is derived from the ranking of the positional status, such as department heads or operational managers, rather than from the individual.

Both, personal and position powers are ascribed on the basis of social power ideologies and the relationship with others (Burns, 1978). In the discussion of social power and influence in regard to leadership, the most widely cited analysis used is the five-fold typology that was developed by French and Raven (1959). In this experiential study, they assessed context situations in which supervisors influenced the subordinates, and the conceptualization of social power and influence were examined. The five bases of power that were identified by French and Raven (1959) are: referent, expert, legitimate, reward and coercive. See Table 1 for a brief description and examples of the original framed five bases of power defined by Hersey and Blanchard (1982):

Table 1. Bases of power

	BASES OF POWER	
PERSONAL POWER:	Referent Power	Based on the leader's personal character. <i>Example:</i> A minister who is admired by the members of the congregation.
	Expert Power	Based on the leader's expertise and knowledge. <i>Example:</i> An aviation data software engineer who has expertise in the design, development, testing and maintenance of software.
POSITION POWER:	Legitimate Power	Based on the leader's position, and implies rights of control or authority. <i>Example:</i> The Supreme Court Justice ruled in favor nationwide that same-sex marriage is constitutional.
	Reward Power	Based on the leader's ability to provide positive rewards for compliance. <i>Example:</i> A teacher rewards a student who has perfect attendance record.
	Coercive Power	Implies a threat and is based on fear-base leadership. <i>Example:</i> A coach who prevents a player from participating in a game, for not attending practice.

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