Status and Power: The Principal Inputs to Influence for Public Managers

The authors identify status and power as the principal bases of influence for public managers and describe how managers can use this conceptual distinction to increase their influence. Status is defined as the degree to which one is respected by one’s colleagues, and power is defined as asymmetric control over valued resources. Different social and relational processes govern (1) how people determine who is, and who ought to be, high status versus powerful and (2) how status and power affect individual psychology and behavior. To illustrate key points, the authors provide examples of individuals from the public sector and public service organizations. The framework of interpersonal influence gives practitioners behavioral strategies for increasing their status and power as well as a way to assess and diagnose interpersonal dimensions of their own performance in their jobs and careers.

Whether preparing for the approach of the next hurricane or turning around failing schools, public managers must find ways to influence others. In such extreme circumstances, influence is not only necessary to develop adequate responses but also expected of managers by their constituents. By virtue of their roles, and others’ responses but also expected of managers by their roles, managers must make decisions with far-reaching expectations of what someone is able to do in those roles. Status is defied as the degree to which one is respected by one’s colleagues, and power is defined as asymmetric control over valued resources. Different social and relational processes govern (1) how people determine who is, and who ought to be, high status versus powerful and (2) how status and power affect individual psychology and behavior. To illustrate key points, the authors provide examples of individuals from the public sector and public service organizations. The framework of interpersonal influence gives practitioners behavioral strategies for increasing their status and power as well as a way to assess and diagnose interpersonal dimensions of their own performance in their jobs and careers.

We propose that status and power are the most significant determinants of influence within organizations. Both status and power are needed for effective influence in the long term, and individuals who occupy administrative positions must keep an eye on developing each one.

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Understanding these principles of how people confer status and power provides insight into how one can increase both bases of influence. From this analysis, we offer several recommendations for how public managers can improve their interpersonal influence.

Power has been discussed in relation to influence before (e.g., French and Raven 1959; Pfeffer 1992; Yukl, Kim, and Falbe 1996), but rarely in the same breath as status—at least not to highlight, as we do here, how they are different (but see Blader and Chen 2012; Magee and Galinsky 2008). As in many areas of the social sciences, scholars of management and organizations have tended to confl ate the concepts of status and power, particularly in their analyses of formal hierarchy. This has obscured the need for an assessment of their distinct roles in processes of influence. However, over the past several years, social psychological studies have demonstrated different effects of status and power in interpersonal relations. We argue that the cumulative results of these studies are relevant to the management of public sector and public service organizations.

Formal hierarchy is a familiar topic of study to public management scholars, and power is embedded in formal hierarchical structures (Simon 1946; Wilson 1989); however, the notion of informal hierarchy as a more dynamic engine of influence has not yet taken hold. Once one asks how informal influence happens in relationships, either power or status is likely to emerge as an important piece of the answer. Of the two, power has received the lion’s share of attention, although even it has masqueraded under many different names (Jensen 2007). This simultaneous lack of precision about constructs and lack of balance in research attention to power and status makes it challenging to assess the accumulation of knowledge about influence in public organizations. As examples of research on power, we point to analyses of discretion (Wilson 1989), resource control (Stazyk and Goerdel 2011), and authority (Alkadry and Tower 2011). The most common area of research in public administration that overlaps with how we will describe status is transformational leadership (Mojnihan, Pandey, and Wright 2012; Van Wart 2003). Of the four factors of transformational leadership, “idealized influence,” which involves “actions that earn respect and cultivate pride” (Bass et al. 2003; Grant 2012), adheres most closely to how we define status.

Underlying our conceptual terrain, Long (1949) and Wilson (1989) have articulated notions of power that have proven useful to public administration scholars. Long (1949) calls attention to how managerial power fluctuates across contexts, depending on the constraints imposed and actions taken by multiple actors. Wilson (1989) describes how greater administrative power is associated with agencies that have wider latitude for action and that can reduce more uncertainty. On the topic of status, Wilson (1989) notes that government agencies’ reputation, and thus their status, is determined largely by their past performance. (Long [1949] does not directly discuss status.)

We build on these classic analyses of public bureaucracies by recognizing, as Long and Wilson did, that the most interesting, and arguably the most consequential, stories about influence emerge in the spaces and cracks between where power is located formally. Our analysis departs from theirs by emphasizing status as much as power, by articulating the importance of the distinction between status and power, and by locating these phenomena in social interactions and relationships between individuals rather than between agencies and institutions.

The Principal Inputs to Influence: Power and Status Definitions

Status is defined as the degree of respect others have for an individual (Fiske 2010; Magee and Galinsky 2008; Ridgeway and Walker 1995), and respect is typically accorded to individuals who are deemed to be both competent and concerned with others’ interests. In these terms, status could be considered the interpersonal analogue of organizational reputation. Public agencies’ reputations are determined by their technical competence, level of performance, procedural fairness, and moral treatment of stakeholders (Carpenter and Krause 2012), and the extent to which these dimensions are attributable to the individuals in charge of these agencies goes a long way toward deciding public managers’ status. Indeed, our recommendations for how public managers can maintain and enhance their status, and thereby increase their influence, will focus on their capacity to demonstrate technical competence in their jobs and to behave prosocially toward colleagues and subordinates.

Theoretically distinct from status, power is defined as asymmetric control over valued resources (Blau 1964; Magee and Galinsky 2008; Thibaut and Kelley 1959), where resources include material, financial, social, and knowledge-based resources. Although managers must offer some valuable resource in order to have power, our recommendations for how public managers can increase their power, and thereby their influence, will focus on projecting an image of control by behaving proactively and confidently.

Our definition of power subsumes other common sources of influence in public service organizations, which the following examples make clear. In cases of asymmetric information, the resource central to the power dynamic is information valued by both parties; one party simply has access to more valuable information than the other party. Expertise is also a resource and highlights the nature of dependence in power relations (Emerson 1962), wherein one party depends on the knowledge of another to accomplish a task or goal. The expert (i.e., the power holder) can choose whether to share his or her expertise. This freedom of choice about the allocation of a resource is part of what it means to have power. After all, if one controls a resource, one also can choose whether and how to allocate it. Such discretion, as it is often called in research on public management and the delivery of public services (Wilson 1989), requires first that the decision maker has some degree of power. That many decision makers with substantial discretion do not have high-ranking formal positions in their organizations’ hierarchies (Lipsky 1980) is part of one of our central claims: formal position can be a poor indicator of power. We also note the importance of status as a determinant of discretion; individuals with more status are typically afforded wider latitude for action by their colleagues.

Although both power and status are relational phenomena determined by what is valued by the parties involved, our definitions direct attention to two important distinctions between the concepts. The first difference is the extent to which they...
are subjective. One's status is typically related to one's attributes, but whether others perceive and value those attributes is of greater importance. In our definition of power, the value of resources is subjectively determined; however, it is necessary for one to have discretion over how resources are distributed within a social system for power to be present at all. Thus, power is less subjective than status. The second difference stems from the first. Because status arises from social conferral—a perceptual and judgmental process—whereas power arises from resource control, subordinates play a more active role in bestowing status on a manager than in granting that manager control over resources (Blader and Chen 2012). For this reason, a manager's relationships with employees are integral to his or her level of status within an organization.

Along with these important differences, status and power share at least two features in common. First and foremost, both status and power can be exercised for influence, and both properties enable individuals to pursue and accomplish significant goals (Magee and Galinsky 2008; Yukl, Kim, and Falbe 1996). Second, status and power are context specific; one's relative power or status depends on the set of social relationships that are relevant to a particular situation. For instance, an individual might possess status in a departmental committee, but that status would not necessarily translate to a liaison role to another department. Similarly, a commissioner might have a great deal of power within his or her agency but little power in commissioner-level meetings with the mayor.

**Public Sector Examples**

**U.S. Senate.** A set of examples from the U.S. Senate help highlight the differences between power and status. High-status/high-power senators are common—unambiguously exemplified by the majority leader. However, for some senators, status is decoupled from power. A low-status/high-power senator, Roland Burris (D-IL), emerged in the aftermath of the 2008 presidential election. The scandal-plagued Illinois governor, Rod Blagojevich, appointed Burris to finish Senator Barack Obama's term, and from the outset, this appointment was clouded in controversy. When finally seated as a member of the majority, Burris was critical to reaching the threshold of 60 votes necessary to block filibusters against health care reform (Herszenhorn 2009). Burris thereby emerged as a high-power actor whose voice became ever more important as the legislation moved nearer to becoming reality (Greiner 2009). Nevertheless, Burris suffered low status, lost the support of his colleagues in seeking a full term (Kellman 2009), and did not attempt to campaign when the seat was up for election.

We find an example of high-status/lower-power in the 61st Senate chaplain (1995–2003), the Reverend Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, who was described as a “one-man Greek Chorus” (West 1999), commenting on each day of former President Bill Clinton's impeachment trial, and who commanded broad respect from both sides of the aisle. Described by Senator Bill Frist (R-TN) as an “anchor” during the trial (Harris and Broadway 1999), Ogilvie's role was entirely grounded in status, not power. Finally, individuals with neither power nor status occupy many operational roles in the Senate out of the public eye.

In the public eye, however, the dynamics of individuals’ power and status, shifting based on whom they are interacting with, are sometimes on display. Congressional hearings, for example, often reveal how quickly power and status can be lost by high-profile officials and executives. For instance, the chairman and president of BP America, Lamar McKay, was summoned to testify before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico (McKay 2010). Within BP, McKay might have enjoyed both high power and high status; however, these properties so essential to his effective management of BP were of little value in the face of the Senate's regulatory power and public evaluation of the company. Although McKay was adept at navigating his way through the Senate's interrogation of BP’s activities, not all managers have proven so skilled at negotiating their loss of status or power. For example, during another Senate hearing into money laundering within Europe's largest bank, HSBC’s head of compliance, David Bagley, resigned rather than attempt to survive within a vacuum left by his loss of status and power (Rushe 2012).

In these examples, notice that formal titles do not always clearly signal individuals’ levels of power and status. The basic structure of organizations—a small top management team or single executive, at least one layer of middle management, and a large number of lower-level employees responsible for day-to-day operations (Mintzberg 1979)—is everlasting in most organizations, but who has influence over whom changes from year to year and from situation to situation. The important markers of influence are the extent to which an individual has discretion over valuable resources at a given point in time and whether that individual has the respect of his or her colleagues. A deputy director, for example, might have more current information (i.e., more power) than the director about a problem that needs to be solved, and employees seek his or her counsel rather than the director's. Or a team leader's autocratic style might cause reactive behavior from his or her team members, who choose to follow the direction of one of their most competent and trustworthy (i.e., high-status) peers. These are cases in which lower-ranking individuals in the formal structure exert more influence than higher-ranking members, and this influence stems from the organic development of power or status in their day-to-day relationships with their coworkers.

Though status and power are dynamic, individuals are also constrained or enabled by the status and power inherent in their organizational roles (see also Fragale, Overbeck, and Neale 2011). In table 1, we present a 2 x 2 grid with a number of roles possessing either low or high status and low or high power. These roles

| Table 1 Selection of Roles Organized by Levels of Status and Power |
|------------------|------------------|
| **Low Status**  | **High Status**  |
| High Status     |      | Low Power | High Power |
| Ambassador      | Executive director |
| Member of advisory board | Head of state |
| Assistant deputy commissioner of city agency | Commissioner of city agency |
| Low Status      |      | Low Power | High Power |
| Janitor         |      | IRS auditor |
| Municipal driver | Prison guard |
| Program staff   |      | Passport control officer |

Note: See Fragale, Overbeck, and Neale (2011) for more examples.
illustrate the importance of the distinction between power and status for a broad swath of public service organizations.

When power is combined with status in individuals’ roles, as is the case for heads of state or many city commissioners, they are typically well positioned to exercise tremendous influence. Individuals in largely symbolic positions—members of an advisory board or ambassadors to foreign countries, for example—enjoy high status but often lack power. Although they do not have substantial control over valuable resources (i.e., power), people in these types of positions are still able to leverage their status toward productive ends.

In contrast, individuals who occupy roles as gatekeepers often possess high power but low status (Mechanic 1962). For example, passport control officers and Internal Revenue Service auditors have a great deal of discretion over the fates of the people with whom they interface, but without professional status, their domain of influence is extremely narrow. Thus, power without status provides only a partial and tenuous advantage. Research on “street-level bureaucracy” takes note of this (Lipsky 1980) and offers a rich literature of how power is used in such positions. Other roles have neither power nor status, and without either base to draw from, influence within one’s organization is difficult to exercise in these positions. Countless jobs fall into this category, including the following notable examples: program staff at government agencies and nonprofits, janitorial staff, and municipal bus drivers.

**The Distinct Effects of Power and Status**

Nothing is more revealing of the differences between status and power than an examination of their distinct psychological effects. There has been a dramatic rise in research on the social psychology of power and status, and these studies have produced a body of knowledge about the ways in which power and status transform how individuals think and behave. For both status and power, we next describe their most robust effects reported in the literature to date and illustrate the relevance of these findings to the public sector through analyses of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina (for power) and the American Red Cross (for status).

**Power**

Power invigorates individuals, giving them a greater sense of agency, resoluteness in their attitudes, and confidence that they will achieve their goals. Power holders are more focused on goal-relevant information (Guinote 2008; Slabu and Guinote 2010) and oriented more toward taking action (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee 2003; Magee, Galinsky, and Gruenfeld 2007) than are powerless individuals. In one study, Galinsky and colleagues (2003) presented all participants with a fan blowing directly at them, such that it was annoying and undesirable. These authors found that participants randomly assigned to a high-power condition were more willing than participants in a low-power condition to take the initiative in shutting off the fan. Their interpretation of this result was that all participants wanted to remove the annoying fan, but only those with power felt liberated to do so. In other words, power was an enabling force that allowed participants to realize their goal. Magee and colleagues (2007) found that in bargaining contexts, those higher in power were more likely to initiate a negotiation and to make the first offer, which typically translated into superior outcomes. These goal- and action-oriented features resonate with the findings that higher-power individuals tend to feel more conviction in their opinions and express more confidence (Briñol et al. 2007; Fast, Halevy, and Galinsky 2012; Magee, Milliken, and Lurie 2010). Other research suggests that high-power individuals approach risk differently than low-power individuals. Greater power is associated with the anticipation of positive outcomes in risky situations, and high-power individuals make riskier choices than low-power individuals (Anderson and Berdahl 2002; Anderson and Galinsky 2006; Maner et al. 2007).

Power also transforms how individuals think about and treat others. High-power individuals tend to behave assertively and egocentrically in social exchanges, such as negotiations and public goods dilemmas (Blader and Chen 2012). Power holders are apt to focus on the features of other people that make them useful to the power holder, whereas individuals without power are less influenced by their goals in how they perceive others (Gruenfeld et al. 2008). In one experiment demonstrating the problems this can cause powerful men in the workplace, Gruenfeld et al. (2008) found that men assigned to a high-power condition were more willing to choose an attractive but only moderately competent female colleague for help with a complex task than men assigned to a low-power condition. This “instrumental perception” among high-power individuals complements the finding that power makes people especially goal oriented (Overbeck and Park 2006); in this case, power holders’ attention enlists other people in the service of their goals. In light of these findings, it is not surprising that power also reduces individuals’ propensity toward perspective taking—the act of considering others’ thoughts and feelings (Galinsky et al. 2006). For example, Galinsky and colleagues (2006) asked participants under conditions of high versus low power to draw a capital letter E on their forehead. They were interested in the proportion of participants in the two conditions that drew the E so that it appeared backwards from the perspective of an observer. As they predicted, high-power participants were more likely to draw the E so that it was illegible to others, indicating a lack of perspective taking. Moreover, Georgeson and Harris (1998, 2000) found that power is associated with failing to appreciate subordinates’ contributions to collective goals, often derogating them and their work (see also Fiske 1993; Kipnis,1972).

Finally, possessing power causes people to process information more abstractly. When observing any object or event in the world, or even interpreting their own behavior, people can use varying degrees of abstraction in their mental representation—a phenomenon referred to as the level of construal, where higher construal levels yield more abstract representations (Trope and Liberman 2010). High-level construal involves a focus on central features, capturing the essence and meaning of the object or event. Low-level construal involves attention to peripheral and concrete details. In demonstrations that high-level construal can give meaning to ambiguous situations, participants in high-power conditions are more likely than participants in low-power conditions to perceive a Gestalt (i.e., a complete picture) when only presented with fragments of whole pictures (such as a partial image of an airplane) (Huang et al. 2011; Smith and Trope 2006). Construal level also applies to how people represent behavior and action. When construing behavior at a high level, individuals focus more on why an action is taken, whereas when construing behavior at a low level, individuals focus more on why actions are taken or what they are doing.
how to perform the action. For example, when deciding whether to vote in an election, one could be thinking about whether to exercise one’s right as a citizen (high-level construal) or whether to go to the poll and complete a ballot (low-level construal). As these examples make clear, people can construe information and think about their behavior at varying levels of abstraction, and power is associated with more abstraction.

Public sector cases: The role of power in the 9/11 attacks and Hurricane Katrina. As the effects of power reviewed here have been documented primarily using laboratory experiments, one might wonder whether the findings are applicable to public management and how they might help us understand managerial behavior in response to real-world events. To explore these issues, Magee and colleagues (Magee, Milliken, and Lurie 2010; Milliken 2012) investigated the effects of power in the aftermath of two high-profile disasters in the United States—the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. Though these disasters were different in many respects, both of them prompted crises in the public sector and beyond. Leaders and lower-ranking employees in all levels of government, in nonprofit organizations, and in for-profit organizations reacted to the events and tried to apply their influence to help remedy the many problems that arose during the crises. Each disaster also deeply affected its powerless victims, and, with the assistance of frontline aid workers, those who survived tried to deal with the immediate impact and to make sense of how the disruption would change their lives.

In the various responses documented by multiple media sources, Magee and colleagues investigated what appear to be drastic differences in how people characterized events in the aftermath of these disasters. This was no more pronounced than in the days after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. Particularly notable was the psychological distance that powerful individuals—the president and other government leaders, chief executive officers of corporations, and even high-ranking officials in the military and in police and fire departments—seemed to have from the experience of many of the victims. The language used by these people in positions of authority seemed like disconnected, abstract representations of the concrete experiences reported by people responding to the disaster “on the ground” (e.g., frontline responders, aid providers, and victims). Milliken et al. (2012) noted that these observations paralleled the laboratory results about the relationship between power and construal level reviewed earlier (Huang et al. 2011; Smith and Trope 2006) and set out to test the validity of these results in the real world. They focused on whether power was associated with abstract construal during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and conducted a similar analysis of the aftermath of 9/11 in order to broaden the implications of their findings (Magee, Milliken, and Lurie 2010). In both cases, these researchers analyzed not only the connection between power and abstraction but also whether power was associated with more positivity and more certainty, two additional findings from the experimental research on power.

The destruction wrought by these disasters exposed differences in how low-power victims and service workers and high-power government officials, military personnel, and others with varying levels of control over outcomes made sense of the chaos. To systematically investigate these differences, Magee and colleagues (Magee, Milliken, and Lurie 2010; Milliken et al. 2012) analyzed what people said in the aftermath of the disasters as trace evidence of how they construed the events as they were unfolding. This evidence came in the form of quotations attributed to specific individuals in news stories and reports produced by multiple media outlets. Coding these statements for three dependent variables of interest—abstraction (versus concreteness), positivity (versus negativity), and certainty (versus uncertainty)—revealed whether people with significant positions of power construed the disasters differently than people who did not have positions of power. Indeed, across both disasters, people in positions of power were more abstract, positive, and certain in their construal of the disasters. For example, the following quotations depict perspectives characteristic of high- and low-power individuals during the aftermath of 9/11 (Magee, Milliken, and Lurie 2010):

High-power: “These markets are remarkably strong and remarkably resilient. And we are quite confident of Pakistan’s support (to pursue perpetrators), and we’re going to continue to move forward. We will do whatever it takes to keep these people safe.”

Low-power: “It’s just desperate times. We will try anything you can. I don’t know how they’re going to do it. (My friend)’s about 6’1,” heavy set, big shoulders, and a big chest.” (p. 365)

The high-power statement is notable for its positivity (“markets are remarkably strong”), certainty (“we are quite confident”), and abstraction (except for the mention of Pakistan, there is little specificity). The low-power statement, by contrast, scores high on negativity (“desperate times”), uncertainty (“I don’t know how”), and concreteness (“[My friend]’s about 6’1,” heavy set”).

The astute reader might notice that the two quotations are also about different aspects of the disaster and wonder whether it might not be the construal that but rather the object of attention that differed between high- and low-power individuals. Not surprisingly, there were, in fact, systematic differences between high- and low-power individuals in their most frequent objects of attention, but after controlling for this variable and a number of others, an analysis of nearly 1,000 quotations from the aftermath of 9/11 revealed that high-power individuals’ construal was more abstract, more positive, and more certain than low-power individuals’ construal (Magee, Milliken, and Lurie 2010). These effects were also replicated in the context of Hurricane Katrina (Milliken et al. 2012). Magee and colleagues argue that these cognitive differences in how people interpret events can be the origin of difficulty for communication and coordination in response to ordinary and extraordinary events alike.

Status

Compared to the profile of power, status appears to be an unambiguously positive force in organizations. High-status individuals are more likely to administer processes fairly and, during negotiations, are more likely to reach an agreement that is mutually satisfying with their counterparts (Blader and Chen 2012). This effect of status on the success of negotiations appears to be partly attributable to generalized positive perceptions of high-status members of organizations. That is, people who have attained high status benefit
from a “halo effect” (Nisbett and Wilson 1977) in how others perceive them on a wide range of favorable attributes. High-status individuals tend to be well liked (Hardy and Van Yung 2006) and are perceived as altruistic and cooperative (Cheng, Tracy, and Henrich 2010). Subordinates tend to give greater latitude to high-status managers than to low-status managers, allowing them more pathways to exercise influence (Bruins, Ellemers, and de Gilder 1999). Consistent with these findings, high-status individuals’ social interactions also tend to be positive experiences (at least from their perspective), as they are typically shown deference in various forms (Goldhamer and Shils 1939). They are seen as role models, solicited for advice, and privileged to receive others’ support when they need it (Fiske 2010; Henrich and Gil-White 2001).

One of the reasons interactions go so well for high-status individuals is the process of expectation confirmation in social interaction. People develop expectations of others from at least two different types of observable “status characteristics” (Berger and Zelditch 1985). Diffuse status characteristics are demographic categories (e.g., age, gender, or race) about which people hold stereotypes. Stereotypes form the basis of generalized expectations about how sociable, intelligent, and motivated members of demographic groups will be across contexts and situations (Fiske et al. 2002). Specific status characteristics are demonstrated competencies in domains that are important for the success of the group (e.g., political skill, engineering ability, or policy analysis skill). Once such expectations are formed, observers are apt to treat targets in an expectation-consistent manner, eliciting responses from targets that confirm their initial expectations (Darley and Fazio 1980). In this way, expectations serve as a bridge between initial perceptions and the subsequent maintenance of status; those who are respected simply because of their privileged position in society, or who perform well during important moments early in their careers, tend to acquire high status (Berger et al. 1977; Ridgeway, Berger, and Smith 1985).

In organizations, job titles or roles are also important sources of expectations about competence. Observers tend to presume supervisors are more competent than subordinates, even without watching task interaction between them (Sande, Ellard, and Ross 1986). In an organizational simulation, Humphrey (1985) assigned participants to manager and clerk roles and found that clerks rated managers as more competent than fellow clerks even though they knew the roles were randomly assigned. Thus, status characteristics provide a distinct advantage to people who possess them, and for those who do not, deferring to their high-status counterparts is the most typical response. These dynamics of status illuminate how some employees can ascend to prestigious positions with little contest: assumed to be competent based on status characteristics, they are supported by their colleagues and become influential well before they are formally promoted to high-ranking positions.

Status can serve as a tempering force for those who otherwise would lean too heavily on their power as a source of influence. Without status, high-power individuals are apt to be insecure, causing them to demean, and even aggress against, others (Fast and Chen 2009; Fast, Halevy, and Galinsky 2012). Consistent with this behavior, people tend to expect negative exchanges with their powerful colleagues unless those colleagues have worked to earn their respect. That is, power holders without status are expected to be quarrelsome and uncooperative, but with status, power holders are expected to be sociable and helpful (Fragale, Overbeck, and Neale 2011).

**Public sector case: Bernadine Healy at the helm of the Red Cross.**

The brief tenure of Dr. Bernadine Healy as president and chief executive officer of the American Red Cross provides a well-publicized illustration (Sontag 2001) of the importance of status to leaders of public service organizations. Healy was recruited in 1999 to the Red Cross’s top position, for which she was eminently qualified given her past experience as head of the National Institutes of Health and of Ohio State University’s College of Medicine and Public Health. But within two years, the board forced Healy to resign, having evaluated her as unconcerned with employees’ points of view.

How could the relationship between a seasoned leader and her organizational stakeholders have soured so quickly? In previous positions, Healy’s professional competence had been sufficient for others to hold her in high regard, but the context for status conferral was different at the Red Cross. As an array of hundreds of networked local chapters, the Red Cross required its managers to be cooperative as well as individually competent. The organization’s mission—to care for the suffering and to model civic participation—also contributed to expectations of cooperation, warmth, and trustworthiness among its members, and especially among its staff. To be receptive to Healy’s leadership, the Red Cross members’ core values needed to match the content of Healy’s messages. After all, when people make persuasive appeals that are at odds with the values that motivate the audience being persuaded, interpersonal influence is unlikely to occur (Barry and Crant 2000; Clary et al. 1994). Healy was apparently unable to see this. She missed opportunities to convey to organizational stakeholders that she was concerned with others’ interests before her own, and she gained a reputation as not giving her employees the benefit of the doubt. In one case, Healy suspended the pay of several staff members during an investigation into their possible misconduct, well before a verdict had been reached. Eventually, the employees were found to have violated company policy, so the outcome of Healy’s judgment was right. Being right, however, was not what was important in the eyes of her employees and volunteer leaders, who lost respect for her because she was unfair in reaching a hasty conclusion. From a series of actions in a similar spirit—competent but not generous or empathic—subordinates began to anticipate and expect negative interactions, fearful of becoming her next target.

Healy’s actions at the Red Cross were a quintessential example of a leader exhibiting what we call “status neglect.” She came to power at the Red Cross with control over the distribution of valuable resources but failed to gain the respect of her stakeholders. As a result, she steadily lost influence over the most critical constituency at the Red Cross: her board of directors. Upon her resignation, Healy wrote to the board: “Maybe you wanted more of a Mary Poppins and less of a Jack Welch” (Sontag 2001, 338). We may think of Jack Welch as influential during his heyday as chief executive officer of GE, cut from the same cloth as Robert Moses at
the apex of his power, but in the context of the Red Cross, as well as many other settings, status conferral hinges on expressions of warmth and trustworthiness (“Mary Poppins” qualities).

It is also important to point out that Healy’s Mary Poppins versus Jack Welch metaphor suggests that, as a woman, her assertive style doubly doomed her at the Red Cross. Scores of studies show that women are expected to be warm and trustworthy, whereas men are expected to be competent and assertive (e.g., Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2008; Heilman 2002), and when women violate their gender stereotype, they lose status (Bowles, Babcock, and Lai 2007; Rudman and Phelan 2008). For example, female senators are less likely than their male counterparts to voice their views on the Senate floor, presumably because the fear of backlash inhibits powerful women from speaking up as much as powerful men (Brescoll 2011). Despite the generally constraining nature of gender stereotypes, in settings that confer status based on cooperation, warmth, and trust, women are likely to excel as leaders (i.e., when the attributes that people value match the gender stereotypic attributes of the leader) (Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani 1995). In fact, Healy’s immediate and influential predecessor, Elizabeth Dole, illustrated this finding through her behavior, and her success, at the helm of the Red Cross for seven years. The director of a local chapter noted the contrast between Healy’s and Dole’s approaches to the same position: “Elizabeth Dole would notice the pin you were wearing, and Dr. Healy would notice the stain on your jacket . . . Dr. Healy was not people-oriented, and the Red Cross is all about people” (Sontag 2001, 333). The principal lesson to draw from this example is that a manager’s status is determined by the extent to which he or she displays attributes that are expected and valued in the local context by the people he or she manages (Anderson, Spataro, and Flynn 2008).

**Recommendations: Changing Behavior to Develop Influence**

Guided by the distinction we have drawn between power and status, next we offer recommendations for how public managers can build and maintain interpersonal influence by understanding how power and status are judged. People try to infer their own and others’ relative power and status in order to assess their challenges and opportunities more effectively. Although these judgments are often implicit, operating at a nonconscious level (Shariff and Tracy 2009), they are based in part on some core dimensions of person perception and social judgment.

**The Core Dimensions of Social Judgment**

To understand how status is judged, a reasonable place to start would be to look at the core dimensions of social judgment: warmth (i.e., trustworthiness and agreeableness) and competence (Fiske et al. 2002). Much of how people judge each other can be reduced to these two dimensions, as this information proves incredibly useful in many interactions and relationships. In forming an impression, we typically want to know whether someone intends to help or harm us (can he or she be trusted?) and the extent to which he or she has the ability to act on those intentions (is he or she competent?) (Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007). As we saw in the case of Bernardine Healy at the Red Cross, the relative importance of either dimension depends both on context and on characteristics of the person being judged. As another example of how the demands for warmth and competence are different for different people, Livingston and Pearce (2009) found that the appearance of warmth among black men, but not among white men, was associated with success in upper echelons of management, presumably because warmth attenuates the stereotype of black men as threatening.

Warmth and competence judgments are apparent in how people perceive their partners in personal and professional relationships (e.g., Judd et al. 2005), assessments of politicians and other leaders (e.g., Abelson et al. 1982; Chemers 1997), and stereotypes of social groups (e.g., Fiske et al. 2002). From the intersection of these dimensions radiate four different attitudinal and behavior reactions (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007) (see figure 1). First, people can be judged cold and incompetent. These are individuals for whom we have contempt and whom we deride and scorn. Interestingly, the number of people in this category is relatively small, as human beings tend to find something positive in each other. Second, people can be judged warm but incompetent. This category shows the limits of likeability without commensurate skill and ability in organizations. These individuals often are dealt with in a patronizing manner, or they are dismissed entirely because of a lack of respect for their knowledge and skills. Third, people can be judged cold but competent. These individuals evoke competitiveness from their colleagues, and, at worst, others try to undermine their efforts. Many people in this category work in professions or have job titles that are respected in society, but their lack of trustworthiness prevents them from gaining status within their organizations. To achieve high status among one’s peers, one must be perceived as both warm and competent. Warm, competent individuals are truly respected and engender cooperation because they have others’ interests in mind and are able to help others reach their goals.

**Developing Status**

Having established that both warmth and competence must be conveyed to present an
aitright case for why one deserves status, the next step is unpacking what cues people use to make their judgments of warmth and competence. The content of those judgments provides the prescription for how to behave if one wants high status. Some cues are very subtle. Smiling communicates warmth, sitting near and leaning toward others communicates interest, and mimicking a partner’s nonverbal behavior develops rapport (Gonzaga et al. 2001; Lakin and Chartrand 2003; Mehrabian 1969). All of these nonverbal behaviors signal the underlying dimension of warmth, as long as they are perceived as genuine; however, one difficulty with trying to strategically communicate warmth is that when behavior is perceived as feigned, it has the opposite effect. When forced, smiling might appear stiff and creepy, leaning into a conversation might seem inappropriate, and trying to copy someone else’s behavior might come across as awkward.

How, then, can one communicate genuine concern for others’ interests without coming across as phony? We think that a straightforward path is to be open to employees’ and other colleagues’ ideas and to look for opportunities to offer them voluntary assistance in professional tasks (Grant 2013). By seeking colleagues out to hear their thoughts and opinions, managers can convey that they are available to listen to colleagues’ ideas, will give those ideas serious consideration, and will implement at least some of those ideas. These characteristics of openness are associated with employees perceiving their manager as trustworthy (Detert and Burris 2007).

Individuals who behave generously are more likely to have status conferred on them by their colleagues (Flynn 2003). The very act of offering help to someone else communicates warmth, and by delivering a service successfully, one has established competence. Such volunteerism takes care of the need to demonstrate both warmth and competence in one act, and, moreover, it provides two additional benefits. First, by contributing to others’ work, one has a chance to exert direct influence over how it gets done, and, second, through the norm of reciprocity, the beneficiary of one’s favor is usually compelled to return the offer of assistance down the road (Cialdini 2001; Gouldner 1960). Thus, prosocial behavior can help build status, an indirect route to influence, and is inherently a direct act of influence.

Openness and generosity come in a variety of forms. One broad strategy involves finding ways to develop support systems for subordinates. Lilian Borrone, director (1988–2000) of port commerce for the New York/New Jersey Port Authority, exemplifies this approach (Schachtler 2008). Early in her first job at the Port Authority, Borrone helped create professional associations for women’s career advancement. After becoming the port’s director, Borrone continued to find ways to mentor employees. Borrone shared her professional contacts with staff members and supported their participation in external committees and task forces, which expanded their networks further. Her generosity earned her the informal, high-status title of “Queen of the Port” among many who worked with and perceived her influence at the port.

Developing Power

To be perceived as powerful, or worthy of a high-power position, it is important to project the sense of being in control in one’s job. Control involves demonstrating agency—that one is able to do as one wishes and that important outcomes are determined by one’s actions (Magee 2009; Overbeck, Tiedens, and Brion 2006). Individuals who freely choose to initiate action to resolve a perceived problem are seen as more powerful than individuals who either fail to act or appear to have had no choice but to act (Magee 2009). How else can people project that they are in control? One simple way is through the expression of confidence, and expressions of confidence have been linked to perceptions of power. People who deliberate extensively over decisions are seen as less powerful than those who decide quickly and focus on implementation (Magee 2009).

When one experiences positive outcomes, observers try to detect whether success was attributable to one’s competence or to luck (Kelley 1973). Projecting that one is in control—by taking action, by expressing confidence in one’s judgments, or by avoiding too much deliberation—blocks people from attributing one’s success to luck and directs people to infer that it was earned. Even when the outcome is negative, the reasons one provides for failure can influence inferences of power. Ironically, although making an external attribution for failure can be self-serving in that it deflects responsibility for a negative event away from the self, individuals who take responsibility when things go awry give others the impression that they are in control (Lee and Tiedens 2001). Regardless of the outcome, internal attributions imply that one’s choices and actions were not constrained by other people or external forces in the situation. That is, by taking responsibility for failure, a leader is suggesting that she has the power to address the problem going forward. In summary, whatever the outcome of one’s actions, there is always an opportunity to convey a sense of control and thus power.

To be perceived as powerful, or worthy of a high-power position, it is important to project the sense of being in control in one’s job.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Different Key Characteristics</th>
<th>Different Consequences</th>
<th>Judged by Different Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The degree to which one is respected by one’s colleagues</td>
<td>• More perspective taking and concern for others’ interests</td>
<td>• Competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More subjective; socially conferred</td>
<td>• Greater deference from others</td>
<td>• Warmth (trustworthiness, agreeableness)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Broader path to influence</td>
<td>• Demographic characteristics (e.g., race, gender, age)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Asymmetric control over valued resources</td>
<td>• Less perspective taking</td>
<td>• Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More objective</td>
<td>• Higher propensity to take action</td>
<td>• Confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Greater confidence</td>
<td>• Assertive action</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More instrumental perception (of others as means to one’s goals)</td>
<td>• Taking responsibility for outcomes (both positive and negative)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More abstract information processing</td>
<td>• Narrower path to influence</td>
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</table>
Eileen Claussen, who rose within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to become director (1987–93) of the Office of Atmospheric Programs, demonstrated this capacity early in her career (Riccucci 1995). Claussen routinely asked supervisors for additional assignments and tasks, thereby projecting a sense of confidence in her work. Riccucci (1995) notes that “resoluteness” became Claussen’s trademark. An industry representative, contrasting Claussen with a typical government official, portrayed her as unusually certain about steps needed to reach the EPA’s goals. After Claussen assumed supervisory responsibilities, one of her subordinates noted she was not the sort to mull over decisions “for days and days.” This profile is typical of a person acting in a way others deem worthy of power. Although she lacked a science degree, Claussen rose up the ranks of a science-oriented agency and, upon reaching a director position, was influential enough to corral the White House into backing international environmental agreements.

Summary
We summarize the key characteristics of power and status, along with their antecedents and consequences, in table 2. We summarize our central claims here.

- There are two principal inputs to influence: status and power. Status is the degree to which one is respected by one’s colleagues. Power is based on the extent to which one controls valuable resources relative to others. Both allow managers to influence others’ behavior and thus achieve leaders’ goals.
- Although level in the formal organizational hierarchy is related to influence, a careful analysis of positions based on status and power often reveals that formal position and influence are only loosely coupled. Some low-level jobs can have surprisingly high power in some situations, and some high-profile jobs can have surprisingly low power.
- Individuals’ capacity to influence is not determined exclusively by their role in the organization. Status and power also develop informally in interpersonal interactions. This helps explain why some managers are more effective than others despite holding identical positions.
- Constituent groups routinely judge whether an administrator is deserving of status and power, even if they are not consciously aware of it. Without attention to the social dynamics of status, influence based on power is not likely to last for long. This “status neglect” helps explain why some formal leaders have short tenures in their positions.
- To gain influence, one can increase power or status (or, ideally, both) based on a sophisticated understanding of how coworkers and colleagues determine others’ status and power.
- Judgments of status are based primarily on warmth and competence, and judgments of power are based primarily on confidence, assertive action, and the appearance of being in control. Public managers can alter their behavior to project these attributes and thus increase their influence over time.

References


