Harvard Business School Case Selections (Reprint)

🕱 哈佛商学案例精选集

(英文影印版)

商务基础系列。

Business Fundamentals Series

新经理人的领导力(第二版)

Leadership New Managers (Second Edition)

John J. Gabarro

约翰·J·加巴罗

Robert Goffee

罗伯特・戈费

等 编写

Linda A. Hill

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Business Fundamentals As Taught at the Harvard Business School

LEADERSHIP FOR NEW MANAGERS, SECOND EDITION



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Business Fundamentals series from Harvard Business School Publishing!

The readings in this collection were developed for the MBA and executive programs of Harvard Business School. These programs rely heavily on the case method of instruction, in which students analyze and discuss firsthand accounts of actual management situations. Students also learn the fundamentals of what managers do: how they measure performance, make choices, and organize their activities. At Harvard Business School, the fundamentals are often taught through background notes, which describe business processes, management techniques, and industries.

The collections in this series are not meant to be comprehensive, but to present the fundamentals of business. Each collection contains several notes, and perhaps an article or two, that provide a framework for understanding a particular business topic or function.

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The Business Fundamentals collections are designed for both individual study and facilitated training. If you want to use this collection for self-study, we've provided a summary, outline, learning objectives, and questions for each reading to help you get started. If these readings are part of a training program in your company, you will find them to be a rich resource for discussion and group work.

You can search for related materials on our Web site: www.hbsp.harvard.edu. We hope that your learning experience will be a rich one.

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POWER DYNAMICS IN ORGANIZATIONS

(L.A. Hill / #9-494-083 / 14 p)

Summary

In this note, Hill introduces new managers to the concept of power. She challenges popular notions that power is "evil" or that "power corrupts" by illustrating how power is used to resolve organizational conflict productively. Managers will find a helpful discussion of the personal and positional sources of power, and will learn how to assess the power dynamics in their organizations.

Outline

What is Power?

Organizations as Political Entities

The Realities of Managerial Life Political Conflict

Where Does Power Come From?

Sources of Positional Power Sources of Personal Power

Assessing Power Dynamics

Learning Objectives

After reading the note and completing the following exercises, managers should be able to:

- Understand power as a tool for resolving organizational conflict.
- Identify their personal and positional sources of power.
- Analyze the power dynamics in their organizations.

Questions and Ideas to Consider

- 1. Assess your unit or department in terms of the diagram in Exhibit 1.
 - a) List the precipitating and prevention factors that currently exist.
 - b) Consider the sources of political conflict identified in the diagram: diversity, interdependence, competition for scarce resources. For each type of conflict, are you inclined to defend your unit's interests at all costs or do you try to negotiate win-win resolutions where possible?
- 2. Consider your job in terms of your positional power and personal power (see Exhibit 2).
 - a) Do you have enough positional and personal power to be effective in your job? If not, how could you acquire what you need?
 - b) Do you have enough positional and personal power to advance in your company? If not, how could you acquire what you need?
- 3. Using Exhibit 3 as a guide, diagram the information network of your department or unit. Do you have direct access to most of the key players? Does the diagram indicate key players with whom you should be building relationships?
- 4. Using the five steps outlined on p. 12, analyze the power dynamics in your particular situation (listing interdependencies, sources of power, sources of conflict, etc.).
 - a) Where are the power dynamics changing?
 - b) What could you do to improve the dynamics to make your unit more effective?



Power Dynamics in Organizations

Introduction

There is nothing more demoralizing than feeling you have a creative idea or a unique insight into a significant problem and then [coming] face-to-face with your organizational impotence. This face of power is seen by many. . . . They are energetic, optimistic, . . . They are supremely confident that their "awesome" ability, state-of-the art training, and indefatigable energy will rocket them up the corporate ladder. However, many soon become discouraged and embittered. They blame the "old guard" for protecting their turf and not being open to new ideas. Their feelings of frustration prompt many to look for greener pastures of opportunity in other companies—only to be confronted anew with rejection and failure. . . . These individuals learn quickly that only the naive believe that the best recommendation gets selected, the most capable individual gets the promotion, and the deserving unit gets its fair share of the budget. These are political decisions heavily influenced by the interests of the powerful.¹

Too many people become disillusioned and cynical early in their careers about the realities of managerial life. Often it is the most principled among them—those who would never "stoop to playing office politics"—who fall the deepest into apathy or fear. There are, of course, organizations with poisonous political climates filled with plotters and schemers who have little regard for the harm they do. We all know of incompetent and unethical people who get ahead because they are "masters at playing the game"; we are familiar with the popular adage that "nice guys finish last." Negative attitudes about power are fueled by such examples and contribute to the belief that "power corrupts."

In fact, however, *powerlessness also corrupts*. As Kanter observed, "It is powerlessness that often creates ineffective, desultory management and petty, dictatorial, rules-minded managerial styles." People with power can shape their environment, whereas the powerless are destined to be molded and constrained by theirs. How often have we heard of people who believed they had "no choice" but to engage in some unethical act because they did not have the "power to change the way

¹D. A. Whetten and K. S. Cameron, *Developing Management Skills: Gaining Power and Influence* (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1993), pp. 26-27.

²R. M. Kanter, "Power Failure in Management Circuits," Harvard Business Review, July-August 1979, p. 65.

Professor Linda A. Hill prepared this note to be used in the second-year MBA elective course Power and Influence. This note is to be used in conjunction with the note "Exercising Influence," HBS No. 494-080.

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things were usually done"? Organizations are inherently political entities, and managers who ignore or fail to understand how power and influence work in organizations find it difficult to be effective and ethical on the job.

In this note, we will focus on developing your diagnostic skills—your ability to assess the power dynamics in your particular situation. We consider four questions: (1) What is power? (2) Why is political conflict inevitable in organizations? (3) Where does power come from? and (4) How can you make sense of the power dynamics in your particular organization?

What is Power?

While there are many different definitions, we define power as the *potential* of an individual (or group) to influence another individual or group. Influence, in turn, is the exercise of power to change the behavior, attitudes, and/or values of that individual or group. It is easier to change behavior than attitudes, and in turn, attitudes than values.

In evaluating an individual's exercise of power and influence, we should apply three interrelated criteria: Is it effective for the individual? Is it effective for the organization? Is it ethical? In answering these questions, both the short- and long-term consequences of an individual's actions should be assessed. For example, consider managers who have attempted to influence their peers to accept a particular product pricing strategy. They should ask themselves at least the following: (1) Did my peers adopt my recommendation—did they change their behavior in the desired fashion? (2) Have my peers "bought into" or been convinced that my recommendation is in fact good for the organization—did they change their attitudes in the desired fashion? If not, implementation might be difficult. (3) Have I behaved ethically? Although I got my peers to do what needed to be done, were the means appropriate? (4) Has my relationship with my peers been improved or damaged? If coercive or deceptive methods of influence have been employed, the managers may have compromised their credibility with their peers; their peers will be more likely to resist subsequent influence attempts. Although there are notable exceptions, managers who are most effective in the long run are those whose actions are also most effective for their organizations and ethical.

Organizations as Political Entities

How do power and influence dynamics work in organizations? Political conflict over scarce or key organizational resources is inevitable, given the challenges of managing in contemporary organizations. Consider these realities of managerial life:

The Realities of Managerial Life

"The Challenge":

- Interdependency: Managers are dependent on others to get things done and get ahead. Others, in turn, are dependent on them.
- **Diversity:** Differences often exist between managers and those on whom they depend (e.g., differing goals, values, stakes, and working styles).
- **Power gap:** Managers do not have formal authority over many, if not most, of the people on whom they are dependent.

"The Solution":

- Law of reciprocity: To be effective, managers must find ways to influence those on whom they depend. The primary way influence is acquired in the absence of formal authority is through the "law of reciprocity" (i.e., the near universal belief that people should be paid back for what they do in some form or another). Because people do believe that "one good (or bad) deed deserves another," influence is possible.³
- Networks: To be effective and ethical, managers must build and maintain networks, mutually beneficial sets of relationships that link them to those with whom they are interdependent.

Political Conflict

Organizations consist of interdependent individuals (and groups) with divergent interests who must figure out how to reconcile these interests. All managerial decisions involve tradeoffs: the need to balance complex and ambiguous issues that generate legitimate disagreements about what is best for the organization.

Other things being equal, the more interdependence, diversity, and resource scarcity in an organization, the more political conflict. There are *prevention factors* that help to reduce the amount of conflict. When people in the organization have shared goals and values (e.g., due to leadership or a strong culture), a common perspective about how critical resources should be distributed and critical contingencies handled is more likely. The capacity to discover mutually beneficial resolutions to those conflicts that do arise also increases. If the organization's cultural norms are consistent with successfully negotiating win-win resolutions or there is expertise in this area, conflict will be ameliorated.

In contrast, there are *precipitating factors* that exacerbate the conflict in an organization. There is likely to be more political conflict in organizations when superordinate goals and values do not exist. Shared goals and values can be lacking for a variety of reasons, for instance, when no shared culture exists or strong leaders fail to define a vision behind which people are aligned and motivated. It is not accidental that interest in leadership and organizational culture has been growing of late; these are useful mechanisms for managing the increased diversity and interdependence inherent in today's organizations.⁵ A void in authority or the formation of competing coalitions (apparent or

³For an in-depth discussion of how such "exchange relationships" work in organizations, see A. R. Cohen and D. L. Bradford, *Influence Without Authority* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1990). It is important to note that all relationships are *not* governed by the law of reciprocity. There are "communal relationships" (e.g., relationships between close friends) in which altruistic behavior occurs. The receipt of a benefit does not create a specific debt or obligation to return a comparable benefit.

⁴See, for example, J. P. Kotter, Power and Influence: Beyond Formal Authority (New York: Free Press, 1985).

⁵Pfeffer provides an insightful observation about the tradeoffs of relying on vision and culture as integrative mechanisms. Diversity can be dangerously reduced and therefore, an organization's ability to adapt to changes in its environment compromised:

A strong culture really constitutes an organizational paradigm, which prescribes how to look at things, what are appropriate methods and techniques for solving problems, and what are the important issues and problems. . . . A well-developed paradigm, or a strong culture, is overturned only with great difficulty, even if it fails to account for data or to lead to new discoveries. In a similar fashion, an organizational paradigm provides a way of thinking about and investigating the world, which reduces uncertainty and provides for effective collective action, but which also overlooks or ignores some lines of inquiry. It is easy for a strong culture to

nascent) also contributes to a lack of common goals and values. In addition, during times of organizational crises, when uncertainty and the stakes tend to increase, people can even lose sight of those things they do in fact hold in common. Crises include, for example, severe downturns in corporate performance or the erosion of a company's reputation in the face of legal indictments.

A promise often associated with the new model of flat and lean corporations in which the boundaries (of hierarchy, function, and geography) have been eradicated is that these companies will become "one big happy family"; many managers hold as an ideal an organization where all politics have been eliminated. This notion, however, is not only unrealistic, it is undesirable. As Hirschhorn and Gilmore point out, conflict among the different constituencies in an organization can be healthy and productive:

R&D has a legitimate interest in long-term research, manufacturing in the producibility of a product, marketing in customer acceptance. A union member who confronts a foreman over an alleged contract violation, a regional vice president who wants to make sure her factories get more investment funds, and the director of a research lab who tries to protect his scientists from intrusions from marketing are all engaged in necessarily political relationships. These relationships can be extremely useful to senior managers, because they mobilize the different interests and perspectives that together add up to a comprehensive view of the entire situation.⁶

To eliminate political conflict, managers would have to eliminate diversity, including the division of labor and specialization. Specialization is often necessary for organizational efficiency and productivity. Diversity and conflict are essential ingredients for creativity and innovation.

Whether or not political conflict will lead to destructive or constructive outcomes depends on how key players respond to it. Can they defend their interests without undermining the organization's efficacy? Of course, there are circumstances in which the "pie cannot be made bigger" and "someone is going to lose." But if they are willing and able to negotiate win-win resolutions when possible and build partnerships across the organization, positive outcomes such as creativity and innovation can result. Otherwise, the pathologies of power, parochial infighting and destructive power struggles, will ensue. Political conflict can be irreconcilable and can escalate out of control. You need only recall the dramatic boardroom battles and corporate splits and breakups chronicled in the Wall Street Journal and Fortune magazine.

Power and influence are the mechanisms by which the inevitable political conflicts in organizations get resolved. Power tends to accrue to those whose activities and locations in the organization are associated with the control of scarce resources and critical contingencies. "Critical contingencies" refer to those activities crucial to an organization's performance given its particular context (e.g., industry, regulatory environment, work force demographics). Salancik and Pfeffer explain why one company's legal department had become powerful and influential:

... when an organization faces a number of lawsuits that threaten its existence, the legal department will gain power and influence over organizational decisions. Somehow other organizational groups will recognize its critical importance and confer upon it a status and power never before enjoyed. This influence may extend beyond handling legal matters and into decisions about product design, advertising

produce groupthink, a pressure to conform to the dominant view. A vision focuses attention, but in that focus, things are often left out.

J. Pfeffer, Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1992), p. 26.

⁶L. Hirschhorn and T. Gilmore, "The New Boundaries of the 'Boundaryless' Company," Harvard Business Review, May-June 1992, p. 108.

production and so on. Such extensions undoubtedly would be accompanied by appropriate, or acceptable, verbal justifications. In time, the head of the legal department may become the head of the corporation, just as in times past the vice president for marketing had become the president when market shares were a worrisome problem, and before him, the chief engineer, who had made the production line run as smooth as silk.⁷

The distribution of power and influence in organizations is generally aligned with the realities they face. The leaders and dominant coalitions are those who have access to resources or control contingencies critical to the organization's performance. Power will generally shift as the organization's critical contingencies change (e.g., when a company changes strategic direction in response to competitive pressures).

Nevertheless, this process can be subverted and power abused. An individual's power and influence can extend far beyond the original or legitimate bases that created it. Dominant coalitions have been known to act primarily to maintain their power position, rather than in the best interests of the organization. The distribution of power and influence can become institutionalized and thereby endure well beyond its usefulness. People with power do not give it up easily. They create structures, policies, and procedures to guarantee their power; the organizational culture that develops further helps to support and consolidate their power. It is no wonder that it sometimes takes a revolution to overthrow an entrenched elite. Organizations have begun to create more checks and balances to prevent these corruptions of power, such as the increased numbers of outside directors on organizational boards or the development of professional codes of ethics.

The bottom line is: Political conflict is at the heart of how organizations function (see Exhibit 1 for a summary description of the political conflict process). The challenge is not how to eliminate the conflict, but rather, how to manage it effectively: (1) how to achieve a careful balance of "not too little and not too much" conflict in the organization; (2) how to encourage win-win resolutions when possible; and (3) how to ensure that the distribution of power and influence can change and adapt to meet the organization's evolving circumstances.

Where Does Power Come From?

How much power and influence an individual accrues is context-specific and hence, dynamic: if the context changes, other things being equal, the individual's power and influence will change. Much of individuals' power stems from the activities they perform and their location in an organization. But to capitalize on the full potential for power inherent in a position, individuals need to have the necessary personal attributes. Indeed, a person's power is determined by two sets of factors: positional and personal characteristics (see Exhibit 2).8

Sources of Positional Power

Formal authority Formal authority refers to a person's position in the organizational hierarchy and his or her explicit "job description" of rights and privileges and responsibilities. The higher in the corporate hierarchy, or the greater the scale and scope of responsibilities, the more power a manager will have. In recent years, formal authority as a primary source of power has been challenged.

⁷G. R. Salancik and J. Pfeffer, "Who Gets Power and How They Hold Onto It: A Strategic Contingency Model of Power," *Organizational Dynamics*, Winter 1977, p. 4.

⁸See, for example, D. A. Whetten and K. S. Cameron, *Developing Management Skills* (Glenview, IL: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1993) for a more comprehensive discussion of these sources of power.

Pyramid and functional organizational structures are being dismantled. Horizontal networks and fluid interfunctional teams, which entail overlapping job responsibilities and multiple chains of command, are becoming more the norm. Other limits to the use of formal authority stem from societal trends. As the work force has become more educated, employees have come to expect more latitude and participation in decision making. In addition, it seems many people have grown cynical about traditional institutions of authority (e.g., tales of corruption among elected officials have led to more skepticism about government) and are simply less accepting of the unilateral use of formal authority as a means of influence.

Relevance People engaged in activities that are closely aligned with corporate priorities will be more powerful than those whose activities are not. (The story of the legal department above is a good example.) In high-tech firms, for instance, where product innovation is often the key competitive advantage, R&D managers are generally quite powerful. Managers in staff or support functions traditionally have less power than managers in line functions, whose contributions to the bottom line are more direct. But consider how much power accrues to people in the maintenance department when a key production system breaks down and others are dependent on them to fix it as quickly as possible. In today's knowledge-intensive and global organizations, information technology is beginning to take on a key strategic role. Thus, the power of managers in information technology departments has been on the rise.

Centrality Those occupying central positions in important networks in organizations tend to have power because others in more peripheral positions must depend on them for access to resources or for getting unique or critical tasks done.

Exhibit 3 depicts the information flow ("who talks to whom") of the breakfast cereal team in a consumer marketing company. Based on her position, Associate Brand Manager #1 holds the most central position in this communication network. She has direct access to five of the seven members in it; she is the one who can reach the most other members of the network by relying on the fewest intermediaries (who might withhold or distort information). She is in an ideal position to collect and distribute information among others. We are all familiar with the saying, "information is power." Therefore, we should not be surprised to learn that Associate Brand Manager #1 often serves as the spokesperson between her peers and subordinates and the boss.

A person's position in the *workflow* network can be as crucial as his or her position in the information network. People who are central can act as conduits for exchanging and integrating the resources and contributions of others who are not directly connected. In the example of Associate Brand Manager #1, her boss has delegated to her the responsibility of managing the relationship with the advertising agency representative. The other members of this network, including the boss, are dependent on her to perform this essential role with aplomb; the success of advertising campaigns determines market share of their product in large measure. Indeed, considerable power is often associated with such boundary-spanning positions in which an individual serves as the bridge or broker who mediates relationships between groups or organizations. So, we are not surprised to discover that Associate Brand Manager #1 was selected by her boss to serve on an interfunctional task force to review the company's approach to new product development: he wanted someone on the team who understood the opportunities and constraints associated with working with their particular advertising agency.

Autonomy The more autonomy—discretion or freedom to exercise judgment—associated with the positions managers hold, the more power they will have. Even when a nonroutine decision is made, the manager with autonomy does not have to seek out approval from a superior. Work assignments high in novelty and variety tend to have considerable autonomy, since it is difficult to develop

⁹See, for example, T. H. Davenport, R. G. Eccles, and L. Prusak, "Information Politics," *Sloan Management Review* 34 (Fall 1992): 53-65.

guidelines or rules to govern how the work should be done. With autonomy comes the latitude to demonstrate initiative and to innovate—in short, to lead and shape the direction in which the organization (or a particular unit) will head. For example, newly minted MBAs are often attracted to "assistant to the president" positions. As "assistants" they are frequently "sent off" without much guidance to do a variety of assignments, some of which can be of strategic import. Sometimes they are permitted to define not simply how they will approach projects, but perhaps more noteworthy, on what projects they will work.

Visibility Managers whose performance is visible to powerful people in the organization tend to have more power than those in jobs where their performance is less obvious. It is not enough just to perform effectively and contribute to organizational success. If others are unaware that the success of an important initiative should be attributed to a particular manager, that manager will not receive "credit." To get ahead, managers have to make sure that people are familiar with their performance. This may be one of the more frustrating aspects of work for many people, and more evidence that "life can be unfair." Unless influential people are aware of a manager's positive performance, he or she will not reap such rewards as desirable assignments, salary increases, and promotions. Thus, for Associate Brand Manager #1, the task force on which she served proved invaluable to her career progress. The team made two major presentations to the senior officers of the company. One of the senior executives was so impressed with Associate Brand Manager #1's performance that he nominated her for the company's high-potential training program.

Besides autonomy, visibility is another appealing feature of "assistant to the president" positions, since they can link people early in their careers into networks that include senior management. Access to these networks provides them the opportunity to display their expertise and leadership qualities. Of course, with opportunity comes risk and the ability to exercise influence without formal authority is crucial in such positions.

With globalization, managers increasingly find themselves working in countries other than those in which their organizations are headquartered. On the one hand, these expatriate positions can be quite relevant and visible, for example, opening an important new foreign market. On the other hand, there is the risk of "being out of sight and out of mind." In fact, after overseas assignments, managers can have difficulty reintegrating back into the home office.

Sources of Personal Power

Expertise Expertise refers to task or organizationally relevant competencies. The more unique and critical a person's expertise, the more important it will be as a source of power. While many people tend to focus on technical expertise, in managerial work, expertise in the human (ability to manage work relationships) and conceptual (ability to see an enterprise as a whole) arenas can be of even greater import.¹⁰

Although formal education plays a role in developing general competencies, it usually takes on-the-job experience to turn these into knowledge and skills suited to a particular task and organizational setting. In this era of accelerating technological innovation and increasing specialization, only those managers who are self-directed learners who continually strive to upgrade and update their knowledge and skills will prosper. ¹¹

¹⁰For discussions of the varying mix of expertise required at different levels of management and in different functional areas, see the classic article by R. L. Katz, "Skills of an Effective Administrator," *Harvard Business Review*, September-October 1974, pp. 90-103.

¹¹See, for example, P. M. Senge, The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 1990).

Track record Managers' track records refer to their task and organizationally relevant experience and accomplishments. Further, it is not just what they have done, but how they have done it. Those who have a positive track record have more power than those who do not. Track record is often viewed as a robust measure of managers' long-term contributions to an organization and as a key predictor of their potential. For example, the number-one salesman in his district for five years was passed over for promotion to manager because he was known to have difficulty working with his peers. Over time, staff in the corporate office had stopped consulting him even on those issues about which he had expertise. As his boss described, "He had developed a reputation for leaving dead bodies behind."

Appraisals of managerial performance, and hence track record, are often subjective. Perceptions of a person's track record may not always reflect reality. Others may not be fully aware of an individual's experiences, achievements, and missteps. In addition, once a person has developed a particular track record, it tends to "stick." Stars are given second chances when they make mistakes, while "slow starters" have trouble climbing on the "fast track."

In some organizations, a person's track record can be an especially important source of power. In one pharmaceutical company, young scientists' reputations were formed early on and followed them for the duration of their careers. Those scientists who had made scientific breakthroughs in their early years were consulted on both scientific and managerial matters years later. Their opinions were rarely scrutinized, much less challenged. In other organizations, however, track records are not so important. In the sales and trading division of one investment bank, the culture was as one person put it, "What have you done for me lately?" Current achievements, not track record, mattered; yesterday's star could be today's pariah.

Attractiveness People who are viewed as possessing attributes that others find attractive, identify with, and would like to emulate tend to be more powerful than those that do not. Such attributes can include both attractive behavior and attractive physical appearance. Research suggests that individuals who are perceived as attractive are also perceived, rightly or wrongly, to be effective and ethical. Others tend to trust and adopt a benevolent benefit-of-the-doubt posture toward them.

Of course, attractiveness is in the eye of the beholder. What is considered attractive in one organizational context may not be viewed so in another. Personal traits and physical appearances that appear to "fit" one organizational culture may not "fit" another. In a consulting firm where analysis is valued, the person who always "shoots from the hip" may not have much influence. In the fashion industry where "looking the part" matters, power may come to the designer who carefully maintains the "casual, yet chic image" with which his or her customers like to be associated.

There are individuals who most people would describe as "charismatic," "likeable," or "above average" in physical attractiveness. ¹² Charisma (e.g., visionary and inspirational leadership) can be an especially potent source of power. ¹³ Many people are ambivalent about the influence and "untoward control" a charismatic leader can have, even when they agree with the leader's vision. "Likability" seems to be associated with behaviors normally found in friendships, for example, openness, honesty, loyalty, and empathy. Leaders with likable personalities are able to inspire confidence in others that they will not abuse their power.

With regard to physical attractiveness, in the U.S., for example, height is a factor that influences others' perceptions of an individual's personal efficacy. It has been documented that short men have been discriminated against in employment situations; they are less likely to be viewed as

¹²Most of the research on attractiveness has been done in the U.S. and some in Western European countries. There is reason to believe that assessments of attractiveness will vary across countries.

¹³For more on charisma, see, for example, J. Conger, *The Charismatic Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991).