



THREE WAYS TO OVERCOME YOUR POWER DEFICIT

HOW EXECUTIVES CAN (RE)GAIN CREDIBILITY IN THEIR ORGANIZATION

By IMD Professor Cyril Bouquet, with Jean-Louis Barsoux

IMD
Chemin de Bellerive 23
PO Box 915,
CH-1001 Lausanne
Switzerland

Tel: +41 21 618 01 11
Fax: +41 21 618 07 07
info@imd.org
www.imd.org

'Power shortage' is not just a term for the energy industry; executives frequently experience deficits in their power to influence as well. Essentially, there are three power sources that need to be maintained in order to avoid, or recover from, a power deficit.

Have you ever found yourself in the frustrating position of voicing suggestions that for some reason keep going unheard? You are not alone; even the most talented of executives often reach such a stage in their careers where they find themselves short of the power and influence needed to get things done. Such power deficits can happen to anyone, from people with high potential to senior executives who are experienced high performers.

Power-deficient executives usually lack one or more of the following "*power sources*":

1. **Legitimacy:** lacking legitimacy with your boss or colleagues can make it difficult to be heard. Lack of legitimacy usually stems from unfavorable perceptions which can, unfortunately, become self-fulfilling.
2. **Resources:** power-deficit executives are unlikely to receive critical resources such as the best people, assignments or sales territories. They might also be granted smaller budgets and less decision-making authority.
3. **Network:** even if executives do not suffer from a lack of the above, they may still be vulnerable unless they have built a strong network of their own, independent of their boss's.

These three sources of power interact constantly, which means that a shortage in one can easily produce shortages in the other two. Fortunately these deficits are reversible.

Methodology

Over a two-year period, we studied 179 participants of IMD's Program for Executive Development. This was done through interviews, as well as essay writing on the part of the participants, through which we sought to identify the types of situations in which the lack of an ability to effect meaningful change was felt. Through an analysis of their findings, we then developed the conceptual framework outlined in this Idea.

Reclaiming Power

Firstly, executives need to assess which power sources they may be lacking. Then, either by 'playing the game' more effectively, or 'changing the game', they can set about trying to reverse their power deficits. We define these two strategies as what you do *in* the job, and what you do *with* the job, respectively.

For example, if lack of legitimacy is the issue, try aligning yourself more with your boss's expectations, and ensure that he/she notices your efforts (i.e. play the game). The other option, which requires more self-confidence, could be to redefine your job description so that you are in better a position to excel (i.e. change the game).

If a lack of resources is the problem, try turning yourself into a resource (change the game). Gain special expertise to acquire more stature and security within your organization. On the other hand, you may prefer to seek opportunities to help senior executives and other powerful people, which will help them come to see you as a valuable ally (play the game).

If a lack of your own network is your concern, try connecting with a senior figure outside your direct line of authority (play the game); this can offer a private view into the upper echelons of your organization, and they may even vouch for your character, performance and accomplishments. Instead, you could try to act as a link with other networks (change the game).

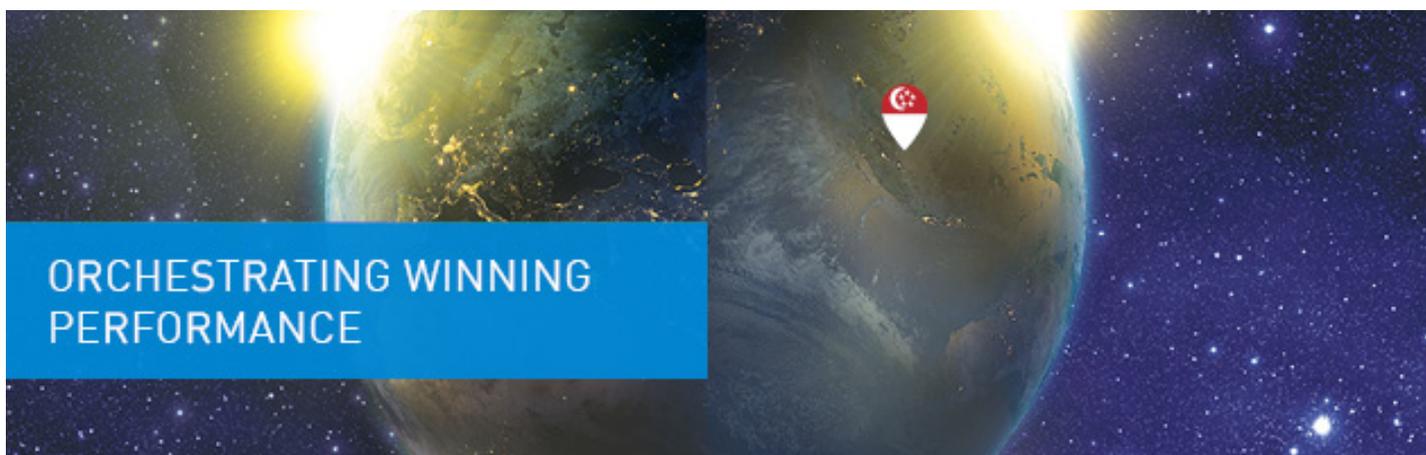
Ultimately, however, executives should avoid the inclination to focus on a single power base; all three sources of power will need to be addressed to truly cast off a power deficit.

[Cyril Bouquet](#) is Professor of Strategy at IMD (Lausanne, Switzerland). His major interest is the interface between organizational psychology, strategy and leadership.

Jean-Louis Barsoux is a Senior Research Fellow at IMD.

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