

Higher Education:

Power and Influence of Academic Administrative Staff Members

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Erik Thompson and Nicole, Jon, Isaiah, Jazzy and Maddi Krueger.

Abstract

This study examines the role of informal power sources available to administrative staff in university academic departments. The research question that drives the analysis is, "In what ways do administrative staff members utilize informal power to influence departmental decision-making?" Data were collected through interviews with chairs, Directors of Graduate Studies, faculty, and administrative staff at a public research university, utilizing a structured interview guide. Results indicate that staff members in the four departments studied possess and use formal and informal power sources. The formal bases of power studied are formal power and legal prerogative power. The major sources of staff informal power described by the interview participants are productive power (notably, political alliances), information power, and resource power. The study suggests that administrative staff members have access to informal power and those with the skill and willingness to use that power can impact departmental decisions.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Dedication	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
I. Background	4
II. Statement of the Problem	6
III. Overview of the Study	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review	9
I. Power in Organizations and the Nature of Power	12
a. What is power?	12
b. Formal Power	15
i. Rationally Organized Structure	16
ii. Levels of Formal Authority	17
iii. Specialization and Integration	18
c. Informal Power	20
i. Informal Subunit Power	21
1. Workflow Pervasiveness or Centrality	22
2. Coping with Uncertainty	22

3.	Task Routinization	23
4.	Substitutability	23
5.	Resource Dependencies.....	24
ii.	Informal Individual Power	26
iii.	Bases of Power	29
1.	Reward or Resources	30
2.	Coercive	31
3.	Legitimate or Position	31
4.	Referent or Individual	32
5.	Expert or Technical Skill	32
6.	Information	32
7.	Alliances and Networks	33
8.	Legal Prerogatives	33
9.	Access, Discretion or Productive	33
II.	Organizational Power in Higher Education	34
a.	Formal Power in Higher Education	35
i.	Presidential Leadership	36
ii.	Shared Governance	37
b.	Informal Power in Higher Education	40
III.	Lower Level Power	49
a.	Mechanic (1962)	50
b.	Mowday (1978)	51

c.	Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkerson (1980, 1988)	52
i.	Shotgun	54
ii.	Bystander	54
iii.	Tactician	54
iv.	Ingratiator	55
d.	O'Reilly (1982)	55
e.	Brass and Burkhardt (1993)	57
IV.	Conclusion	60
Chapter 3:	Research Design	62
I.	Conceptual Framework	62
a.	Formal Power	65
i.	Formal Power: Power of President and other Institutional Leaders	65
ii.	Formal Power: Power of Shared Governance	66
iii.	Formal Power: Power of Departmental Faculty	66
iv.	Formal Power: Power of Administrative Staff	67
b.	Informal Power	67
i.	Informal Power: Power of Subunits	68
ii.	Informal Power: Power of Individuals	69
iii.	Informal Power: Power of Departmental Faculty	71
iv.	Informal Power: Power of Administrative Staff	71
c.	Departmental Decision Making	73

d. Framework Connections	74
II. Methodology	76
III. Data Collection	77
a. Setting	79
b. Procedures for selecting sample participants	80
c. Instrumentation	81
d. Pilot Testing	81
e. Anticipated Ethical Issues	81
f. Data analysis Strategies	82
IV. Conclusion	82
Chapter 4: Results	84
I. Characteristics of Respondents	86
II. Power of Administrative Assistants: Illustrative Narratives	86
a. Mary Taylor: Expertise and Skills	87
b. Cathy Wentz: Information Power	88
c. Janet Armstrong: Productive Power	90
III. Emerging Themes	93
IV. Power of Administrative Assistants by Domains of Departmental Decision-Making	97
V. Formal and Informal Power: Departmental Administrative Staff	99
a. Administrative Staff Formal Power	99
b. Administrative Staff Formal Power: Legal Prerogatives	102

c.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Coercive	103
d.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Expertise and skills	107
e.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Information	107
f.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Productive	112
g.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Referent	119
h.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Resource	120
VI.	Power Utilization and Willingness	123
VII.	Summary	125
Chapter 5:	Discussion and Conclusions	127
I.	Summary of Findings	128
a.	Administrative Staff Power	128
i.	Administrative Staff Formal Power	129
ii.	Administrative Staff: Legal Prerogatives	129
iii.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Coercive	130
iv.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Expertise and Skills .	131
v.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Information	132
vi.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Productive	133
vii.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Referent	134
viii.	Administrative Staff Informal Power: Resource	135
b.	Power Utilization and Willingness	136
II.	Implications for Theory	137
III.	Implications for Practice	137

IV.	Limitations of this Study	139
V.	Suggestions for Future Research	140
VI.	Conclusion	140
	References	143
	Appendices	150
	a. Appendix A: Information Sheet for Research	151
	b. Appendix B: Interview Instrument: Questionnaire	152
	c. Appendix C: Interview Instrument: Administrative Assistants	153
	d. Appendix D: Interview Instrument: Chairs and Directors of Graduate Studies	155
	e. Appendix E: Interview Instrument: Faculty members	157
	f. Appendix F: IRB Approval Letter	159

List of Tables

Table 1: Organizational Power Theories	14
Table 2: Emerging Themes	96
Table 3: Types of Formal and Informal Power Mentioned by Study Respondents in Relation to Domains of Departmental Decision-Making.....	98

List of Figures

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Decision-making in Academic

Departments 64

Chapter 1: Introduction

“It is not unusual for lower participants in complex organizations to assume and wield considerable power and influence not associated with their formally defined positions” (Mechanic, 1962, pp. 349-350).

In a university, one might assume that people on the top of the hierarchical ladder, such as the university president, board of regents, college deans, and department chairs, hold the power to influence major issues. One may also assume that professional staff are limited to making only mundane decisions like setting meeting times and determining office procedures and that they are not involved in decisions that influence budgets, hiring, firing, and long-term goals. The reality is that academic administrative support staff can hold considerable power in the day-to-day operation of the university and may even influence long-term goals and the direction the university takes.

Organizational power is the use of power or political influence to impose an individual's or subunit's will on another person or entity in the organization. Pfeffer (1992) describes power as “the potential ability to influence behavior, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things that they would not otherwise do” (p. 30).

The study of an individual's or a group's power sources and power utilization necessitates placing the question within the context of organizational power as a whole. Numerous scholars have examined organizational politics and power, but their studies

have diverged in research focus and design. Organizational power is apparent in a variety of environments, including business, industry, government, educational institutions, and the medical field. Organizational power has been described as both hierarchal (superior-subordinate) and as intra-organizational, where “the division of labor becomes the ultimate source of intra-organizational power, and power is explained by variables that are elements of each subunit’s task, its functioning, and its line with the activities of other subunits” (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971, p. 217). In addition to organizational power being described as a function of subunits, researchers also discuss power as a function of interpersonal relationships. Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) propose that organizational power can be “interpersonal or involve relations between organizational units” (p. 454).

Administrative staff members have informal power outside of any formal hierarchical power associated with their position. If administrative assistants hold informal power, they may choose to use politics and influence to impact organizational decisions. They are the keepers of departmental information and history, and they are often at the center of formal and informal communications. Administrative staff members are frequently the people with information regarding budget, potential meetings, meeting agendas, and behind-the-scenes actions. They are usually the quickest and most easily accessible source of information for decision-makers. The nature of some staff members’ positions makes it possible for them to influence decisions by framing the way they share information with university administrators and other decision-makers or by withholding

information altogether. Their positions can provide them with the political skill and the willingness to exercise the power to control decisions (Mintzberg, 1983).

This exercise of power by staff members is one example of the use of upward influence processes. Porter, Angle, and Allen (2003) contend there are two types of upward influence processes, “formally-sanctioned” and “informal and unofficial” (p. 408). Two examples of upward influence exerted by an administrative assistant help differentiate between the two processes.

In the first scenario, a faculty member asks to teach in room 101 in Alumni Hall because it has advanced classroom technology capabilities. The administrative assistant rearranges classroom assignments so that Dr. Jones can teach in this classroom. The assistant presents the classroom assignments to the department chairperson for *pro forma* approval. If the chairperson is charged with scheduling classrooms, but has delegated this task to the administrative assistant, this is an example of formally-sanctioned upward influence.

In the second scenario, a faculty member sends a memo to the department chairperson, asking to teach no evening courses spring semester. The administrative assistant goes online and checks evening courses for the last two years, and informs the chair that it is unfair for Dr. Jones not to teach an evening course, because he “skipped his last turn” teaching a night course. Subsequently, Dr. Jones is scheduled to teach Monday evenings spring semester. This behavior is an example of informal and unofficial upward-influence behavior.

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of organizational power, specifically addressing informal, upward-influence power utilized by administrative staff and its effect on departmental decision-making.

Background

Research has focused on power sources accessed by divisions, departments, and administrators. There is little written about power sources accessed and utilized by university staff members.

Organizational power is created through dependencies on others for resources, information, technical assistance, and other organizational needs. In 1962, Mechanic proposed that when one individual is dependent on another, the first individual is “subject to the other person’s power. Within organizations one makes others dependent upon him by controlling access to information, persons, and instrumentalities” (p. 352).

In addition to being created through resource dependencies, power can be incumbent in a position, based on being located centrally in an organizational network. Astley and Sachdeva (1984) discuss network positions within intraorganizational power as being “differentiated both vertically by hierarchical level and horizontally by divisions or departments” and propose that “these differentiated positions are reintegrated through interconnecting workflows that form a relatively stable network of patterned interactions,” (p. 106). Astley and Sachdeva also state that “network centrality can be regarded as an additional source of intraorganizational power over and above an actor’s ability to generate dependencies through resource exchange. Such power is attached to an

actor's position in the network rather than derived from a control of resources within any particular dyadic relationship" (p. 106).

In university settings, departmental staff members are often the people with information regarding budgets, potential meetings, and meeting agendas. They may also possess critical technical skills, belong to alliances and networks, and control access to decision-makers. In addition, staff members often provide continuity and institutional memory and are often the quickest and most easily accessible source of information for decision-makers.

O'Reilly (1982) noted that other researchers have found that decision makers sometimes choose easily accessible information over high-quality information and they may choose information that "advocates a certain position" (O'Reilly, p. 758). Based on his own research, O'Reilly (1982) stated that it is "accessibility, rather than quality, that more often predicts the source of a decision maker's information" (O'Reilly, p. 768). He found that in the "case of organizational communication and information," information sources that have been judged as accurate in the past may be relied on again, without evaluating the "accuracy of the content" (p. 767-768).

Staff members may end up making decisions by possessing and utilizing a power source. For example, in regards to information, they can frame the way a correspondence is shared with chairpersons and others within the university, or withhold information altogether. These staff members can have an inordinate amount of power and the ability to misuse that power, which may influence departmental decisions. Influencing decisions

regarding matters such as resource allocations can influence the ability of faculty members to perform their jobs to their own satisfaction.

In times of funding scarcity, hiring freezes and rumors of possible retrenchment; conflict, coalition building, and other power plays increase in respect to resource allocations. A staff member with budgetary information may have increasing power and influence as faculty members seek him or her out for assistance in obtaining research dollars, graduate assistantships, and other funding resources.

If a skillful employee has the desire to influence others, coupled with a network position or dependency powers, behavioral tactics can be employed to influence colleagues and supervisors. The longer the employee has been associated with the department or the university, the more they are trusted, and are able to develop others' dependencies on their skills. A modern-day example of power through dependencies is the increase in power of computer-savvy staff members, as changes in technology increase organizational reliance on their critical technical skills.

Statement of the Problem

This examines power distributions and hierarchies within academic departments. The research question that drives it is, "In what ways do administrative staff members utilize informal power to influence departmental decision-making?"

In a university, academic administrative support staff can hold considerable power in day-to-day operations and departmental decisions. Decisions regarding matters such as resource allocations can influence the ability of faculty members to perform their

jobs to their own satisfaction. Current research focuses on power sources accessed by divisions, departments, and administrators, but the sources and uses of power employed by academic administrative assistants remain largely unexamined.

It is crucial to understand all sources of formal and informal power in higher education and to investigate how these power sources impact the allocation and use of institutional resources. Currently, many public colleges and universities face tight budgets and foresee ongoing cuts in state allocations for higher education (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1/15/2010, p 15).

Budget constraints may hit departments differently. In times of abundance, incremental (or historical) budgeting is the norm. In times of resource scarcity, there is competition, and sub-unit power may have a stronger impact on departmental allocations (Hills & Mahoney, 1978). Salancik and Pfeffer maintain, “As long as there is no scarcity, there is no problem of resource allocation and no reason for subunits to use their differential influence within the organization. With increasing scarcity, resource allocation becomes problematic; every subunit will vie for resources according to its needs and demands, but not all will be able to completely satisfy their demands” (1974, p. 463). With the possibility that budget cuts will occur within university departments now or in the near future, it is critical to ensure that all resources are being utilized with utmost efficiency and for maximum student and faculty benefit.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 2 explores intraorganizational power in four parts; formal organizational power, informal organizational power, power characteristics unique to higher education, and lower-level participant power. Chapter 3 describes the use of a qualitative methodology to explore the attitudes and beliefs surrounding the ways in which administrative staff members utilize informal power to influence departmental decision-making. Chapter 4 discusses the interview data that were collected and presents the study findings. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings and a discussion of the results.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In an organization such as a university, one would assume that people on the top of the hierarchical ladder, such as the university president, board of regents, college deans, and department chairs hold the power to influence major issues. One might also assume that professional staff would only make mundane decisions such as setting meeting times and determining office procedures, not decisions that influence budgets, hiring and firing and long-term goals. The reality is that academic administrative support staff have considerable power in the day-to-day operation of the university and even in the long-term goals and direction the university takes.

In an organization such as a university, academic administrative support staff can hold considerable power. Organizational power is the use of power or political influence to impose an individual or subunit's will on another person or entity. Pfeffer (1992) describes power as, "the potential ability to influence behavior, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things that they would not otherwise do" (p. 30).

The study of an individual's or a group's power sources and power utilization necessitates placing the question within the context of organizational power as a whole. Numerous scholars have examined organizational politics and power, but their studies have diverged in research focus and design. Organizational power is apparent in a variety of environments, including business, industry, government, educational institutions, and the medical field. Organizational power has been described as both hierarchal (superior-

subordinate) and as intra-organizational, where “the division of labor becomes the ultimate source of intra-organizational power, and power is explained by variables that are elements of each subunit’s task, its functioning, and its line with the activities of other subunits” (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971 p. 317). In addition to organizational power being described as a function of subunits, researchers also discuss power as a function of interpersonal relationships. Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) propose that organizational power can be “interpersonal or involve relations between organizational units” (p. 454).

Administrative staff members have informal power, outside of formal hierarchical power warranted by their position. If administrative assistants hold informal power, they may choose to use politics and influence to impact organizational decisions. They are the keepers of departmental information and history and they are often in the middle of formal and informal communications. Administrative staff members are frequently the people with information regarding budget, potential meetings, meeting agendas, and behind the scenes actions. They are usually the quickest and most easily accessible source of information for decision-makers. The nature of some staff members’ positions make it possible for them to influence decisions by framing the way they share information with university administrators and other decision-makers, or by withholding information altogether. Their positions can provide staff members with the political skill and the willingness to exercise this skill, the power to control decisions (Mintzberg, 1983).

The intent of this paper is to examine the nature of organizational power; exploring both sub-unit and individual power. The paper’s five parts explore formal

organizational power, informal organizational power, power characteristics unique to higher education, lower-level participant power, and research gaps and implications. In the first section, formal organizational power is examined by looking at rationally organized structure, levels of formal authority, and specialization and integration. The second part looks at informal organizational power wielded by both organizational sub-units and individuals. The third section discusses organizational power in higher education and the unique properties of academic freedom and faculty governance. The fourth section addresses lower-level participant power and leads into the fifth section, which discusses gaps in current research and proposes potential research questions.

Power in Organizations and the Nature of Power

What is power?

Power is often associated with institutional authority or influence. The term power and the phrase use of power can have negative connotations, but power is a legitimate and essential part of organizational leadership. Kanter (1979) defends power as a means to effective management and as the source of an organization's ability to accomplish their goals and objectives. Leaders accomplish more and earn more respect if their employees perceive them as being powerful in the organizational structure. Power leads to effectiveness because of, "first, access to resources, information, and support necessary to carry out a task; and, second, ability to get cooperation in doing what is necessary" (Kanter, 1979, p. 343). Throughout this work the word power will be defined as Salancik and Pfeffer described in 1977; "Power is simply the ability to get things done the way one wants them to be done" (p. 4). In this study this definition of power is linked to decision-making as a critical step in getting things done.

This study distinguished between formal power and informal power. Formal power is authority linked to hierarchical structures that legitimate the power. Informal power is influence exerted largely outside of hierarchical structures.

The four aspects of organizational power examined in this paper are formal power, informal subunit power, informal individual power, and lower level power (see

Table 1). Organizational power in higher education and the unique properties of academic freedom and faculty governance are also examined and discussed.

Table 1

Organizational Power Theories

- I. Formal Power (Vertical)
- II. Informal Subunit Power (Horizontal) - Strategic Contingencies Theory
- III. Informal Individual Power (Horizontal) - Social Network Theory and Bases of Power
- IV. Lower Level Power

Formal Power

An organization is a complex entity made up of people interacting together to reach an established goal. The success of a structural bureaucracy depends on clearly defined purposes, roles, activities, and reporting lines. Classic theory supports a structural system as the best fit for organizational operations. In 1957, Merton, in discussing organizational bureaucracy, states, “A formal, rationally organized social structure involves clearly defined patterns of activity in which, ideally, every series of actions is functionally related to the purposes of the organization” (in Shafritz & Ott, 2001, p. 103). In 1997, Pfeffer discusses the different thought pattern necessary in order to focus on achieving organizational goals, rather than the goals of the individual employees. Pfeffer states, “focus on structure tends to direct attention away from the characteristics of individuals, such as their personalities, attitudes, backgrounds, or beliefs, and toward the enduring properties of the relations among actors that both constrain and enable action to occur” (p. 789). Bolman and Deal (2003) discuss organizational roles and relationships and state, “clear, well-understood roles and relationships and adequate coordination are key to how well an organization performs” (p. 44).

Organizational charts, strategic plans, goals and priorities, policies, processes and procedures typify modern organizational structures. An individual’s formal power depends upon their position in an organization’s hierarchical structure. Researchers refer to organizational formal power as vertical, structural, or hierarchal power. In Weber’s pivotal work (1922), he described bureaucracies, as a system where managers supervise

lower participants, as, “principles of office hierarchy and of levels of graded authority” (in Shafritz & Ott, 2001, p. 73). Brass and Burkhardt (1993) discuss hierarchical power as authority and power residing in a position and propose that hierarchical position power is one of the strongest sources of institutional power. In whatever way researchers refer to formal power, structural principles include a rationally organized structure, levels of formal authority, and task specialization and integration (Bolman, & Deal, 2003, Brass & Burkhardt, 1993).

Rationally organized structure.

The very nature of vertical structure lends itself to a rationally organized system. Bolman and Deal (2003) maintain that an organization operating under a structural frame is a system that operates rationally with rules, order, and control. In order to maintain organizational rationality an administrator needs to base its structures on organizational goals and objectives, environmental conditions, goods and services produced, and technological needs (Bolman, & Deal).

Organizational planning allows goals to be set and control processes allow managers to assess progress towards achieving these goals (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Presley and Leslie (1999) refer to this planning process as strategy and describe it as, “the content of decisions about how to move the organization in a particular direction” (p. 202). The success of this process depends on management’s ability to convince subordinates to buy-in to these goals and to work toward their successful completion.

Researchers disagree about rational planning effectiveness and about how closely organizations adhere to their strategic plans and stated goals. Pfeffer and Salancik (1977) declare that organizations that are well thought out and designed will operate more effectively and they describe the goal of a *rationaly organized system* to be one that, “given the contingencies, will be seen as something rationally planned” (p. 17). The problem with this theory is that it is sometimes hard to describe a good organizational design, the information used to develop plans is sometimes biased or inaccurate, and the formal organizational plan can look quite different from the actual organizational structure (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1977). Researchers have described this disconnection between formal and actual structure and goals as a “loose-coupling,” where “structural elements are only loosely linked to each other and to activities” (Meyer and Rowan, 1983, p. 532-533). Despite these drawbacks, Courpasson (2000) calls for a return to a “Weberian point of view” (p. 141). Courpasson believes organizations can be “centrally governed,” domination is the most efficient means of governance, and employees want to “be governed” (pp. 143-144).

Levels of formal authority.

Formal authority is power associated with an individual’s position in the organization’s hierarchal structure. In 1946, Weber called this system, “the principles of office hierarchy” and defined it as, “a firmly ordered system of super- and sub-ordination” (p. 73). Individuals higher on the organizational chart have more responsibilities, authority, and power (Krackhardt, 1990). A higher level in the

organizational hierarchy not only gives a manager the ability to control lower level employees; it also bestows additional power to make changes in organizational processes, procedures, and structure (Pieró and Meliá, 2003).

Specialization and integration.

Organizations divide work into a range of specialized tasks and jobs.

Specialization (division of labor) prescribes employee roles and guides them through their tasks. Simon (1946) states this specialization increases organizational efficiency by determining a “hierarchy of authority,” “limiting the span of control,” and “grouping the workers for purposes of control” (p.112). Organizations “tie the many elements together by means of both vertical and horizontal techniques for integration,” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 67) through processes that “group people into working units” and establish “integration” (p. 49). Administrators organize these work groups by function, time of day (shift), products, clients served, location, and or process, based on the optimal structure for the specific organization and task (Mintzberg, 1979, Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 49).

In vertical coordination, managers use their legitimate power based on the hierarchal system to allocate and control the work of their subordinates. The power structure, based upon the use of “authority, rules and policies, and planning and control systems” provides a chain of command that allows superiors to align work with organizational goals (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 50). Rules and policies provide guidelines for employees and managers and allow standards to be set and quality maintained (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Theorists have studied bureaucracy and hierarchical structure since the 1920's, when Max Weber first discussed, "the principles of office hierarchy and of levels of graded authority" (in Shafritz and Ott, p. 73). Since that time, researchers have investigated the pros and cons of the bureaucratic system and described alternate power structures. Jaques (1990) defends bureaucratic systems with levels of hierarchy for its ability to "release energy and creativity, rationalize productivity, and actually improve morale" (p. 234).

Many theorists argue structural power is only one of the types of organizational power systems, and a flawed one at best. In 1977 Pfeffer and Salancik offer concerns with structural systems, stating that 1) it is difficult to define structural criteria, 2) structures and plans are not closely linked to the environment in which they operate, and 3) there is an impaired connection between formal structure and actual structure (p. 17-18).

Brass and Burkhardt (1993) also declare that researchers need to consider two structure types. They describe the two structures as, "formal (hierarchical level) and informal (network position)," which they associate with "resource dependency" theory (p. 444).

Courpasson (2000) described two structures, a soft bureaucracy, where Weber's (1946) views on hierarchy are impacted by Crozier's (1963) view is that organizational uncertainties can be exploited by any organizational member, which distributes power widely across the organization. The following section on informal organizational power discusses many of these researcher's views.

Informal Power

When theorists view organization as a structural entity and examine it as a bureaucracy, they view power as a top-down phenomenon. Pfeffer and Salancik (1974) contrast the bureaucratic (hierarchical) model with a coalition model and hypothesize that, “organizational decision-making... is a political process and can be explained by consideration of relative sub-unit power, as well as by consideration of possible bureaucratic criteria” (p. 13). Bolman and Deal describe organizations as, “coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups,” and describe “the political frame” as the process of these groups making decisions and allocating scarce resources through, “bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for positions” (2003 pp. 186-187). Bolman and Deal suggest that a “key political issue is power – its distribution and exercise” (2003 p. 188).

Informal organizational power is power that is outside of an organizations formal hierarchical system. It is possible for both individual organizational members and organizational subunits (departments) to have organizational power. Informal power, often called horizontal power “organizes around scarce and critical resources” (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977, p. 8). In addition to monetary and budgetary resources, other critical resources include positions, physical space, and allies (Pfeffer, 1994).

Internal and external forces can influence the use of power by organizational members. Scarcity causes individuals and sub-units to ensure survival by using political influence and power; this can include collaboration, collusion, and bargaining (Bolman & Deal, 2003, Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). Bolman and Deal (2003) describe organizational politics as, “the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context

of scarcity and divergent interests. This view puts politics at the heart of decision-making” (p.181) and they maintain that, “scarce resources and incompatible preferences cause needs to collide” (p. 192).The ensuing section describes informal subunit power, informal individual power, and the bases of power individuals maintain.

Informal subunit power.

Subunit power, or an individual unit’s ability to influence organizational activities, can vary greatly between subunits, based upon resources, organizational centrality, and ability to cope with uncertainty, routinization, and substitutability. Lachman (1989) defines subunit power as “the capacity of a subunit to influence the behavior of other social units in the pursuit of its own interests, within an interactive open system” (p. 232).

Subunits can be broken down into smaller operational units and imbalances of power can exist between these units. Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, and Pennings (1971) propose the strategic contingencies theory. They focus on power vested in organizational subunits rather than individuals, proposing “the division of labor becomes the ultimate source of intraorganizational power, and power is explained by variables that are elements of each subunit’s task, its functioning, and its links with the activities of other subunits” (p. 217).

Strategic contingencies theory suggests that power is based on a subunit’s information centrality, ability to cope with unpredictability, ability to routinize, and the

non-substitutability of the resources or services they are able to provide (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971).

Workflow pervasiveness or centrality.

A unit's power increases if it has organizational centrality. A unit's centrality relates to the extent its activities are interlinked into the organization's total operation. If the activities are connected with many other organizational activities, they have workflow pervasiveness (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971, p. 221). To have a high degree of centrality, in addition to workflow pervasiveness, a department's activities need to be essential to the operation of the organization. Pervasiveness or centrality is related to workflow immediacy, described as "the speed and severity with which workflows of a subunit affect the final outputs of the organization" (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, and Pennings, 1971, pp. 221-222). The more operational "contingencies are controlled by a subunit, the greater its power within the organization" (p. 222). Managers need to discover not only the effect of the weight of each of the three areas (effectiveness of coping, centrality, and criticality), but also learn how they operate together to affect power (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971; Hinings Hickson, Hinings, Pennings, & Schneck, 1974).

Coping with uncertainty.

Uncertainty prevents an organization from innovating, so if a department helps other departments cope with uncertainty, it increases the organizations ability to move

forward into new arenas. The department that is helping the organization to cope with uncertainty gains power because dependencies are developed. Departments with more routinized tasks will face less uncertainty and develop less dependence (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971; Hinings, Hickson, Hinings, Pennings, & Schneck, 1974).

Task routinization.

A department gains power when it is able to routinize its tasks and procedures. “Routinization” enhances a unit’s coping ability and is accomplished by prevention, information, or absorption (Hinings, Hickson, Hinings, Pennings, & Schneck, 1974, p. 23). Coping by prevention occurs when a unit’s activities reduce the chance of the organization being disrupted by variations in supplies. Coping by information happens when a unit is able to forewarn an organization of possible supply shortages or concerns. Coping by absorption is when a unit has the ability to offset “variations in the inputs of the organization” (Hinings, Hickson, Hinings, Pennings, & Schneck, 1974, p. 29). Accomplishing any of these routinization tasks increases a sub-unit’s power.

Substitutability.

A subunit that is coping with uncertainty by prevention, information, or absorption creates a dependency on their resources. Dependency is decreased if the organization finds alternative, cost-effective ways to cope with their uncertainty. Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck and Pennings (1971) propose that “the lower the

substitutability of the activities of a subunit, the greater its power within the organization” (p. 221).

Resource dependencies.

Hinings, Hickson, Pennings, and Schneck (1974) find that “different subunits” use “different routes to power at different times,” but those making contingencies strategic need to create dependencies (p. 41). Power results from dependencies (Hinings, Hickson, Pennings, & Schneck, 1974, Saunders, 1990). In order to accomplish their goals and objectives, organizations operate as coalitions and the differing proportions of subunit power affect organizational decision-making. Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) found, “Subunit power accrues to those departments that are most instrumental in bringing in or providing resources which are highly valued by the total organization. In turn, this power enables these subunits to obtain more of these scarce and critical resources allocated within the organization” (p. 470).

In 1974 Hinings, Hickson, Pennings, and Schneck validated the 1971 Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, and Pennings study by finding “evidence that only a combination of high values on all the variables postulated gave dominant first-rank power” (p.40). They espoused that the variables are weighted, with the highest being “coping, then immediacy, then non-substitutability, and last pervasiveness” (p. 40), but that combinations of contingencies is what results in power, no contingency alone was sufficient to gain power.

Critics argue that strategic contingencies theory is thorough and well thought out, but power is not completely explained unless you take into account individual (vertical) power and motives (Blackburn, 1981). Astley and Sachdeva (1984) state that the Hinings, Hickson, Pennings, and Schneck research is the only study that looks at the “interaction of resource control and network centrality as sources of intraorganizational control” (p. 107). These researchers go on to criticize the 1974 study for not describing “qualitative differences between resource control and network centrality” (p. 107) and for being drawn from one hierarchy, so horizontal variances alone are studied, not “vertically across levels” (p.108). Saunders (1990) voiced numerous criticisms and proposed a modified model for the strategic contingency theory. Saunders felt the Hinings et al. 1974 research used “inferences from the values of variables” rather than “measuring control of a strategic contingency” (p. 1). She further believed there were ambiguities in the original model, which “led to multiple interpretations” (p. 3). Saunders proposed a revised model where “control of strategic contingencies is viewed as a moderator variable,” rather than a determinant (p. 4). Saunders research based on this assumption failed to support the original 1974 Hinings et al. hypothesis and she found the “tests of the modified theory are supported to a greater extent” (p. 9). More research is needed to address the above criticisms.

Informal subunit power can influence organizational activities. The ability to exercise this power can vary greatly between subunits, based upon resources, organizational centrality, and ability to cope with uncertainty, routinization, and

substitutability. The next section examines the impact of informal individual power on organizational activities.

Informal individual power.

In addition to formal (hierarchical) power and informal subunit power, organizational activities are impacted by informal individual power. Informal individual power is power that accrues to an individual based on factors outside of the formal hierarchical power structure. Mintzberg (1983) proposes that organizational behavior is a power game and that individuals seek to become influencers and to have some control over an organization's practices, policies, decisions, and actions. Influencers who have a central organizational position with access to information can skillfully utilize that information to exercise informal power. Mintzberg proposed that this use of power is based on network position (1983).

Informal power depends on having a base(s) of power (see page 21), but having a source of power is not the sole source of an individual's informal power. Bases of power need to be coupled with "will and skill" for someone to be an influencer (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 354). The "will" is when an individual holding a basis of power is prepared to expend energy to exercise his power. Individuals must be willing to make the effort and take the time necessary to create change, whether it means serving on a committee or becoming a voice of opposition. Individuals and managers have a limited amount of energy to spend, so "power gets distributed more widely" than we would expect (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 354). The skill that Mintzberg describes is political skill, the ability

to use a base of power to convince others to use their “resources, information, and technical skills” for their advantage, and the ability to organize alliances to help further their cause (p. 355). Mintzberg’s (1983) conclusion is that power comes from, not only having a basis for power, but also from being willing to expend the necessary energy and having the political skills to carry out the changes without provoking resistance.

Researchers have found that information is a source of power for individuals in organizations. Information is used as a means to persuade others to act in accordance with an individual’s wishes (O’Reilly, 1982, Feldman & March, 1981). O’Reilly (1982) states, “the direct relationship between the quality of information used by decision-makers and decision-making performance has been well-established,” but, information can be “contradictory or vague, available from sources of varying credibility, applicable to a number of tasks being performed, and available at social as well as economic costs” (O’Reilly, 1982, p. 756).

One theory of individual power, social network theory goes further, discussing informational power as it relates to an individual’s network position. Informal structural power is based upon patterns of interactions among individuals, causing a power structure to be institutionalized over time (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993). Employees interact within three social networks, workflow, communication, and friendship (Brass 1984, p. 519). Individuals who are in key positions within these networks gain power through the information they have access to and control. Brass and Burkhardt (1993) state, “People in central network positions have greater access to and potential control over relevant resources such as information” (1993, p. 444). Power obtained from having

a central network position results in a resource dependency relationship, based on the exchange of information. Individuals who are in a central position in the communication network are in a position to "withhold, disclose, and modify information in order to influence others' perceptions and attributions of power," (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993, p. 447). Within this power system, a dependency relationship is established. "People who are able to control relevant resources and thereby increase others' dependence on them are in a position to acquire power in addition to increasing others' dependence on them. Actors must also decrease their dependence on others. They must also have access to relevant resources that are not controlled or mediated by others. Most empirical studies have found that an employee's centrality in an intra-organizational network is related to power" (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993, pp. 444-445).

Hierarchical power is a given, while it appears network position power is only achieved through exercising overt or covert behaviors. Brass and Burkhardt (1993) conclude there are "two kinds of structural positions that serve as bases for power and constraints on behavior in organizations: formal position or hierarchical level and informal or network position. Of these, position in an organizational hierarchy appears to be a source of power that is largely independent of the use of behavioral tactics" (p. 462). They state, "As a group the informal network positions appear to be weaker, less recognizable sources of power that are dependent on the strategic use of behavioral tactics." They also assert, "It appears that people in a position to mediate or control the flow of information in an organization must use that information to form coalitions, or exchange it for other desired outcomes, to acquire power. Although closeness centrality

was significantly related to power, it also appeared to be dependent upon strategic action” (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993, p. 462). Brass and Burkhardt believe individuals “differ in abilities, skill, and willingness to use those skills and abilities to acquire and exercise power” (1993, p. 447).

Informal organizational power is exercised by individual organizational members and by organizational subunits. Strategic contingency theorists investigate power based on a subunits organizational centrality. Social network theorists investigate structural power based on an individual’s network position. Critics argue that describing either of these power theories without the other is shortsighted.

Bases of Power

In 1959, French and Raven published their classic research on the bases of social power. French (1999) states social power is “the ability of a person or group to induce or prevent change in another” (p. 162). The sources of power that French and Raven (1959) name are reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. Following French and Raven, numerous scholars have expanded the discussion and research on these five original sources of power and they proposed additional power sources.

Mintzberg (1983) describes five sources of power; control of a resource, control of a technical skill, control of a body of knowledge, legal prerogatives, and access to others who possess one of the other four power sources. Kanter (1979) lists three organizational sources of power. First, lines of supply, or the ability to influence outward

environment, means the manager can bring in needed resources to accomplish tasks. Second, lines of information, places the manager “in the loop” formally and informally. Finally, lines of support, suggests the manager has backing from administration, thus freeing him to be innovative and use his own discretion. Kanter (1979) also discusses productive power, a systemic source of power from job activities and political alliances. She proposes that power is inherent in a job designed to allow individual discretion and in jobs that put an individual in close contact with people in authority.

The section below describes French and Raven’s original five power sources, comments where other researcher’s describe similar power sources by alternate names, and adds in additional power sources and discussions from other scholars.

Reward or resources.

French and Raven (1959) described reward power as power based on an individual’s capacity to provide rewards. Reward power is based upon someone’s ability to give special considerations. Bolman and Deal (2003) illustrate this source as power based upon the individual’s authority to reward an employee’s conformity by providing positive rewards, or by removing negative conditions. Control of rewards is power because of the ability to provide additional resources (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Mintzberg (1983) describes control of essential, non-substitutable resources as a power source (Mintzberg 1983). Mintzberg lists these as, “materials, money, resources to distribute as rewards, and perhaps even prestige” (p. 344). Kanter’s (1979) description of power from lines of supply is comparable to Mintzberg’s control of an essential resource, although

she does not specifically mention rewards. Kanter describes lines of supply as the ability to influence the outward environment in order to bring in the resources needed to accomplish tasks.

Coercive.

Coercive power is the antithesis to reward power and it is based on an individual's ability to punish someone or to stipulate sanctions because of non-conformance. The subordinate or coworker that is the object of the coercion knows they will be punished if they "fail to conform to the influence attempt" (French & Raven, 1959, p. 322). Bolman and Deal (2003) explain coercive power as power derived from fear of another individual's ability to control or to punish.

Legitimate or position.

Legitimate power is authority provided by organizational position. Similar to the hierarchical power that Weber describes, it is based on hierarchal level and status. An individual with this power has the right to expect subordinates to comply with their requests (French & Raven, 1959). Position power is power someone has from being in a position of authority. Brass & Burkhardt (1993) propose this hierarchal position power places an individual within important communications networks, which is as a key power position.

Referent or individual.

Referent power is based on the person's likeability and the ability of others to relate to that person. French and Raven (1959) describe this as attraction: "the greater the attraction, the greater the identification, and consequently the greater the referent power" (p. 325). The employee identifying with the *likeable* person wants to emulate and be like them. Bolman and Deal (2003) say that personal power comes from an individual's "charisma, energy and stamina, and political skills" (pp. 194).

Expert or technical skill.

Expert power accrues to an individual who has the expertise needed for a current organizational problem or situation. These individuals are respected and deferred to because of their specialized knowledge (French & Raven, 1959). Mintzberg (1983) describes this power source as having control of a critical technical skill. For example, organization's today may have groups with advanced computer skills who derive power from this knowledge.

Information.

Mintzberg (1983) describes this power source as control of a critical "body of knowledge" (p. 354). Kanter's (1979) description of power from lines of information is comparable to Mintzberg's control of a body of knowledge. *Lines of information* refers to a manager who is "in the loop" formally and informally (p.344). Bolman and Deal (2003) state that power is obtained from having the information that people seek. Information

power can be a critical power source if an individual in a central network position chooses to withhold or modify information.

Alliances and networks.

The *ability to get things done* by working with a group of friends and allies is alliances and networks power (Bolman & Deal 2003). Kanter and Mintzberg also describe power that comes from alliances. Mintzberg (1983) describes this source of power as having access to individuals with power, while Kanter describes it as having powerful “political alliances” (p. 344).

Legal prerogatives.

Mintzberg describes “formal power” from “legal prerogatives - exclusive rights or privileges to impose choices” (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 354). Legal prerogatives can grant formal power to an organization, including the rights to “hire and fire” and to “issue orders” (p. 354).

Access, discretion, or productive.

Access and control of agenda power is obtained through having a seat at the table when decisions are made. Framing control of meaning and symbols power is from a leaders ability to define “identities, beliefs, and values” of an organization (Bolman & Deal 2003, pp. 194-196). Mintzberg (1983) describes power that comes from having access to individuals with one or more of the other four sources of power available to

them. Power comes from being close to people who may be “in the know” or have access to one of the other bases of power. Similarly, Kanter (1979) describes lines of support as a power source, meaning the manager has backing from administration. Kanter calls this productive power, or systemic sources of power from job activities and political alliances. Kanter proposes that power is inherent in jobs that are designed to allow individual discretion and in jobs that put an individual in close contact with prestigious people or people in authority. Kanter believes that when managers are in powerful situations they are respected by and have the cooperation of their employees, allowing them to accomplish more and earn more respect and cooperation (Kanter, 1979).

The number of bases of power have grown and changed since French and Raven’s initial research in 1959. What has remained is the belief that power exists outside of an organizations formal hierarchical structure and that power is not equally distributed among organizational members; rather it is based on members having one or more power bases.

Formal and informal power held by subunits and individuals effect organizational operations. The next section discusses the anomalies to organizational power that researchers have found when examining power in institutions of higher education...

Organizational Power in Higher Education

Organizational power in higher education can be formal or informal similar to other institutions, but there are important distinctions. The formal power of shared governance is unique to higher education. College and university presidents have many

constituents that effect their power to lead, the most influential being faculty. The unique aspect of informal power in a higher educational institution has more to do with the research published on the subject, rather than the subject itself. The majority of research exploring informal organizational power in higher education focuses on power as indicated by budgetary allocations.

Formal Power in Higher Education

Formal organizational power in higher education is similar to other institutions, except for the unique characteristic of shared governance. Researchers describe higher education formal leadership as a system of shared governance. The president leads and at the same time answers to the board of trustees, the faculty senate, collective bargaining units, student groups, and alumni boards (Birnbaum, 1999; Cohen & March, 1974; Eckel, 2000). Doi (1965) described authority in colleges and universities as shared by the governing board, administration, and by the faculty; stating, “Power is shared by faculty, students, alumni, and administration; and coordination is achieved through consensus” (p. 349). The president is the voice of the university and the faculty provides the major influence on presidential leadership, so analysis of these two aspects of organizational power in higher education is important.

Presidential leadership.

The college or university president is the symbolic leader of the institution, but leadership does not come from the president alone. Cohen and March (1974) call the president's role "leadership in an organized Anarchy," describing the ambiguities the president faces as those of purpose, power, experience, and success (p. 195). Presidential power is impacted by what they are trying to accomplish, (Cohen and March). Bolman and Deal (2003) declare, "A president's power lies particularly in zones of indifference – areas few people care much about" (p.196).

Leaders of colleges and universities have internal and external constituents. Externally, presidents serve the institutions' governing boards that they oversee and they answer to state coordinating or governing boards, the federal government, accrediting agencies, judicial bodies, alumni groups, and the public at large (Birnbaum, 1999, p. 324). Internally, the president oversees and answers to faculty shared governance, collective bargaining units, and student governance (Birnbaum).

Leadership roles also extend to internal and external arenas. Externally the president "solicits support from donors, represents the institution to legislative and other external audiences, deals with alumni and athletics, protects academic freedom, and makes public pronouncements on educational issues" (Birnbaum, 1999, p. 326). Internal responsibilities can include, "managing the finances of the institution and its budget, long-range institutional planning, coordination of the academic program, and the maintenances of appropriate standards of quality, personnel policies, and student affairs" (Birnbaum, 1999, p. 326).

The university president seems to have all of the responsibilities but none of the power. The president “serves at the pleasure of a public or private board of lay trustees” and he is the “chief executive and administrative officer of the board as well as the chief academic officer of the faculty” (Birnbaum, 1999, p. 325-326). The board delegates to the president the power to perform these responsibilities, but the “reality of presidential influence is quite different ... one president commented ‘regardless of what may appear in the charter and bylaws the authority of the president, his real leadership, depends on the willingness of the campus to accept him as a leader’” (Birnbaum, 1999, p. 326).

Limits are set on presidents that hamper leadership. Constraints on presidential discretion can come from outside agencies, such as statewide governing or coordinating boards, statewide university systems, and state and federal authorities. Constraints within institutions can be from faculty and non-faculty bargaining groups, interest groups, trustees, and administrative bureaucracy (Birnbaum, 1999, p. 329). The president’s ability to lead constituents is often based on their effectiveness as a team player. “Presidential effectiveness is based as much upon influence as upon authority, and influence in an academic institution depends upon mutual and reciprocal process of social exchange. Effective presidents influence others by allowing themselves to be influenced,” (Birnbaum, 1999, p. 338).

Shared governance.

College and university governance is a system of shared governance between governing boards, presidential leadership teams, and the faculties. In addition, collective

bargaining units, staff, and student associations are all part of the decision-making process, but none to the extent of the faculty. Birnbaum (1999) described higher education governance as a joint responsibility that “involves all important campus constituencies, with particular emphasis given to the participation of the faculty” (p. 327). He went on to avow that in matters regarding or affecting the curriculum the president *is* expected to follow the faculty’s lead.

Academic freedom and tenure support faculty shared governance and formally endorse its place in higher education. In 1940, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of American Colleges adopted the “Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure,” (AAUP Policy, Tenth Ed. 2 (10/26/06). Since the adoption of the *Statement*, there has been numerous edits and additional sections added. O’Neil (1999) points out a crucial addition to the *Statement* adopted in 1994 is the “Statement on the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom,” which emphasizes the link between faculty governances and “the condition of academic freedom” (p. 92). The AAUP website discusses academic freedom in the section titled, “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities” (2007). The document states faculties have primary responsibility in areas relating to curriculum and instruction, and in areas relating to faculty status. The statement is specific about the relationship between a university president and the faculty on these matters, stating, “On these matters the power of review or final decision lodged in the governing board or delegated by it to the president should be exercised adversely only in exceptional circumstances, and for reasons communicated to the faculty” (AAUP, 2007).

In a document prepared by the American Federation of Teachers, they further describe the connection between academic tenure, academic freedom, and shared governance; they state, “Academic tenure protects the status, academic freedom, and independent voice of scholars and teachers. Shared governance, in turn, arose out of a recognition that:… faculty and professional staff are in the best position to shape and implement curriculum and research policy, to select academic colleagues and judge their work” (2007, p.4).

Shared governance is accepted and expected in higher educational institutions today. Administrators feel the limits shared governance puts on their powers, but they also appreciate some of its benefits. Eckel (2000) reports that higher education administrators use the system of shared governance in order to make tough decisions (p. 18). Shared governance allows administrators to “gain a commitment,” to bring “various interest groups together” in order to “accomplish tasks,” and to prevent errors through the gathering of decision-making data (p. 32). In Eckel’s research, he found faculty made “important contributions that administrators were unable to provide” (p. 33). Administrators can also use the system to get the results they desire, while passing the blame for negative effects on to others.

Despite shared governance and the power held on and off campus by numerous constituents, the campus community wants leadership. Birnbaum stated, “presidential leadership may not be real, but rather, a social attribution, a result of the tendency of campus constituents to assign to a president the responsibility for unusual institutional outcomes, because the president fills a role identified as a leader; because presidents are

visible and prominent, because presidents spend a great deal of time doing leader-like things,, and because we all have the need to believe in the effectiveness of individual control” (Birnbaum, 1999, p. 339).

Informal Organizational Power in Higher Education

A great deal of scholarship on the effect of informal power in a university setting is based upon research on resource allocations among academic departments. Initiating this trend, Pfeffer and Salancik (1974) assert that “organizational decision making, particularly with respect to decisions that allocate resources within the organization, are political in nature and to understand resource allocation within organizations considerations of relative power of the subunits, as well as of bureaucratic criteria are necessary” (p. 138).

Nominally, universities use the bureaucratic criteria of precedence (incremental budgeting) and departmental workload to allocate funds to academic units. Budgetary allocation criteria consistent with a bureaucratic model are student enrollment and departmental “relative workload and change in overall workload,” (Hills and Mahoney, 1978, p. 459). Instructional workload is measured in number of graduate students, instructional units, and instructional units per faculty member (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1974, p. 142). Pfeffer and Moore (1980) found change in enrollment is “significantly associated with later resource allocations..., indicating that this bureaucratic criterion had an effect on allocations over time as well as cross-sectionally” (p. 646).

In times of stability (enrollments, FTE's, resources) incremental budgeting based upon precedence is a major factor in departmental allocations. To avoid the bargaining and conflict involved in zero-based budgeting, the budget is based upon historical figures and the incremental portion of the budget is the only piece of the pie under discussion. Hills and Mahoney, (1978) discussed the budgetary process and stated, "Only during periods of scarcity of resources will there be competition for resources, competition normally resisted because of its potentially disruptive effect upon the coalition" (p. 455). Based on this assumption, Hills and Mahoney examined incremental budgets, rather than total budgets. They found that precedence was the major factor in incremental budgeting in times of abundance, but a secondary factor in times of scarcity (p. 464). Pfeffer and Moore's (1980) research results supported this conclusion. They examined total budget allocations on two campuses and for the period studied, they concluded that historical budgets "accounted for 88 percent of the variance in budget allocations." They also concluded that "the variables of enrollment change, power, paradigm development, and the interaction of enrollment change with paradigm development together accounted for an additional 7 percent of the variance" (1980, p. 647).

Researchers posit that in addition to bureaucratic criteria, coalitional criteria reflecting departmental power also effects resource allocations. Important criteria investigated include proportion of external grants and contracts, committee membership, proportion of graduate students, national reputation, paradigm development, external advisory boards and linkages, centrality, and criticality can all affect departmental power.

In addition, researchers investigate the impacts of resource scarcity or abundance and departmental size.

Universities are composed of departments with approximately equal power within the structural bureaucracy. These departments “have clearly defined identities and face diverse external environments,” causing the units to “contribute differentially to the resources of the overall organization” (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974, p. 10). The authors propose that these differing contributions lead to uneven sub-unit power within the organization, with units that contribute larger amounts of resources to the university acquiring more power than units who contribute smaller amounts.

In 1974, Salancik and Pfeffer conducted interviews in order to determine what resources were critical to an organization and how these resources influenced power. They investigated seven critical resources departments contribute, such as number of undergraduate students, national prestige, administrative expertise, and contracts and grants. The most important power source noted was faculty contracts and grants. Salancik and Pfeffer next looked at the contribution that each department made to the seven critical resources. Salancik and Pfeffer found that three resources, instructional units, outside contracts and grants, and national ranking, contributed to “about 70 percent of the variance in subunit power in the university” (p. 11).

Salancik and Pfeffer took the study a step further, believing more is learned by looking at “how power actually influences the decisions and policies of organizations” (1974, p. 12). They stated that by comparing departmental budget allocations, a “rational model of decision making” is observed and that budget allocations “favor those who

perform the stated purposes of the organization — teaching undergraduates and training professional and scientific talent – well” (1974, p. 12).

In a university, a highly critical resource is the general budget. Salancik and Pfeffer found when it comes to budget allocations “subunit power was the major predictor, overriding such factors as student demand for courses, national reputations of departments, or even the size of a department’s faculty” (1974, p. 13). Examining resources in addition to general budget, Salancik and Pfeffer found, that a department’s “importance to an organization gives them power to influence resource allocations that enhance their own survival” (1977, p. 14),

Salancik and Pfeffer posited that the largest budgetary allocation variance, based upon departmental power, appears to be due to contributing resources to the university through procurement of external grants and contracts (1977). Pfeffer and Moore (1980) further state that outside grants and contracts are important for graduate student enrollment and research, along with generating additional funds. The department’s increased enrollment, supported by grants and contracts, further increases university allocations to the departments when funds are distributed based on student enrollment (Pfeffer, J. & Moore, W.L., 1980, 639).

Salancik and Pfeffer further propose that organizations use power prudently, both when needed and when likely to be successful, suggesting three conditions that influence a sub-units decision to exercise power: “scarcity, criticality, and uncertainty” (1974, p. 13). They suggest that a department will attempt to exert their influence when organizational resources are scarce, if the resources available are critical to their

activities, if there is uncertainty about the allocation process, or there is fear that arbitrary decision processes are in place.

One group of researchers, Hills and Mahoney (1978) used the variable of matching funds granted from external sources, rather than grants and contracts. They asserted that, “Only matching funds, not grants and contracts, were considered, since matching funds require a commitment of resources within the university as a condition for receipt of the external funds” (1978, p. 461). Hills and Mahoney also looked at external ties as a variable, taking into account affiliation with an outside advisory board. They found that the “presence of an advisory board, was a significant influence on discretionary budget increment” during both times of scarcity and times of abundance (p. 463).

Salancik and Pfeffer’s data indicated the relative proportion of graduate students was an important predictor of subunit power, second only to obtaining external grants and contracts. They concluded that “graduate education and research were empirically found to be the best predictors of university power within the organization” (p. 460).

Pfeffer and Salancik proposed using committee membership as a measure of subunit power (1974). They proposed that some committees impact resource allocations and membership on those committees would increase a subunit’s power. Based on their data, they concluded that membership on significant committees effects departmental power and resource allocations (145). Hills and Mahoney (1978) contradicted these findings in their study of the University of Minnesota budget process. They concluded that “committee representation does not appear to influence discretionary budget

decisions directly in our setting” (p. 463). In 1980 Pfeffer and Moore disputed Hills and Mahoney’s findings, saying that Hills and Mahoney “did not attempt to estimate the predictors of departmental power, nor did they use an interview-based measure of power. Indeed, their two indicators of power were not strongly correlated with each other” (p. 639). Pfeffer and Moore concluded from their study of two campuses that their data was consistent with Pfeffer and Salancik’s 1974 findings that committee membership does influence departmental power.

Some departments have a higher proportion of university allocations than warranted for their departmental size or departmental workload, but they justify this increased share based on their national reputation. Pfeffer and Salancik (1974) did not find evidence to support that theory, stating, “national rank does not account for the findings of an effect of subunit power on the resource allocation process” (p. 147). Interestingly, Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) found that national rank did have an effect on subunit power, but it followed in importance to grants and contracts, and “relative proportion of graduate students” (p. 460). Pfeffer and Moore (1980) replicated results and conclusions made by Pfeffer and Salancik, finding that national ranking did not significantly effect allocations.

Hills and Mahoney included an additional variable in their 1978 study, external advisory boards and linkages. They proposed, “Affiliation with an external advisory board indicates a base of influence external to the university, which can exert pressure upon the university administration favorable to the subunit” (1978, pp. 460-61). Hills and Mahoney’s findings indicated association with an outside advisory board significantly

influenced departmental allocations during periods of scarcity and abundance (p. 463). Pfeffer and Moore concluded this indicates further support for the “importance of external linkages” (1980, p. 638).

Pfeffer and Moore (1980) investigated yet another variable, paradigm development. They suggest that “paradigm development, characterizing the department’s scientific field, was found to predict the level of grants and contract funds obtained as well as to help explain budget allocations” (p.637). Pfeffer and Moore found that “paradigm development has a strong relationship with the amount of grant and contract funds” and that “enrollment, departmental power, and the level of paradigm development are significantly related to the allocation of both the budget and faculty positions, there being a significant effect of the interaction of enrollment and paradigm development in explaining budget allocations” (p.645).

Hackman (1985) proposes that resource allocations to university departments and units are based upon the units centrality to the organization’s mission; which in turn “affects how four other theoretical concepts interact; internal resource allocations, environmental power, institutional power, and resource negotiation strategies” (1985, p 61). Hackman names core units, “those units whose functions are essential to the central mission of an institution” (p. 62). The essential activities of a research institution are teaching and research, so according to Hackman, most academic departments are core units and administrative and support offices are peripheral units.

Ashar and Shapiro (1988) dispute Hackman’s work and her definition of departmental centrality as the unit’s centrality to an organization’s mission. Historical

research on organizational subunit power defines centrality in terms of “centrality in an organization’s workflow” (p. 275). Utilizing all academic units as core units provides no guidance for departmental allocations during times of scarcity. Ashar and Shapiro assert that defining organizational centrality in relation to workflow allows for quantifying measures of centrality and distinguishing between core and peripheral academic units (1988, p. 278-79). They use four indicators of centrality, including number of research collaborations, teaching collaborations, broad classes the department offers, and non-major students registered for classes (Ashar and Shapiro, 1988 p. 279).

Hills and Mahoney point at criticality as an important factor in university budgeting. They found that during periods of stability, resource allocation methods suggest the bureaucratic model of budgeting based on incremental financing and workload. During periods of scarcity, resource allocation methods suggest the coalition model of budgeting, which finds power to be a determinant (1978).

When discussing power as a factor in budget allocations, researchers are careful to account for any departmental size effect (Pfeffer, J. & Salancik, G.R., 1974, Hills, F.S. & Mahoney, T.A., 1978, Pfeffer, J. & Moore, W.L., 1980, Hackman, J.D., 1985, and Ashar H. & Shapiro, J. Z., 1988). Department size (faculty FTEs) can effect external grants and contracts, student enrollment, and representation on university committees, but researchers found that budget allocation variances were not all explained by department size (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974). Salancik and Pfeffer found departmental power significantly correlated with budget allocations even when statistically controlling for departmental size (p. 457). They also proposed the possibility that departments use their

power for departmental growth; the increased size then leads to an additional increase in power (p. 146).

Researchers propose university resource allocations are based upon the bureaucratic criteria of incremental budgeting, organizational and departmental changes, and political power. They found that along with the structural processes in place for resource allocation, compromises, coalitions, and bargaining also contributed to resource allocation decisions (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974).

It is clear from the research that informal organizational power plays a large role in the power and influence of an institution. However, there is yet another level of power in this equation, lower level participant power.

Lower Level Power

There is a growing body of literature related to lower-level participant power. In their work on “dual economy theory,” Kalleberg, Wallace & Althauser (1981) define lower-level participant power, which they name “worker power” (p. 652). Worker power is “attributes gained by persons, individually and collectively in the labor force which increase their ability to obtain valued rewards from work” (Kalleberg, Wallace & Althauser, 1981, p. 652). Studying economic segmentation, they relate a portion of income inequality to worker traits, including union membership, education, skill set, license, position, and employment tenure. They define worker power as “the ability of employees, individually or collectively, to obtain an advantages position in the stratification system...workers may obtain power relative to other workers as well as with employers” (Kalleberg, Wallace & Althauser, 1981, p. 656).

In this section, the discussion is limited to individual influence and tactics, rather than group power, based on the researcher’s topic of interest. Early studies include research by Mechanic (1962) addressing position power; Mowday (1978) discussing five upper influence methods; dual studies by Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkerson (1980) and Kipnis, Schmidt (1988) proposing and refining lower-level participant influence styles; and a study by O’Reilly (1982) discussing information as a power source. Brass and Burkhardt's more recent research (1993) investigates hierarchical level and “betweenness measures.”

Mechanic (1962)

Power is not limited to individuals or groups in leadership positions. Lower-level participants hold considerable political power. Mechanic (1962) purports, “It is not unusual for lower participants in complex organizations to assume and wield considerable power and influence not associated with their formally defined positions” (pp. 349-350). Informal power comes from dependencies that develop based on their placement within the organization. Mechanic proposes that although level of access to an organization's information, peoples, and resources is an indication of hierarchy level, variables other than formal structure develop that allow access beyond that which is prescribed to individuals based upon their position. His conjecture is that increasing your dependence on someone increases his or her power; “within organizations one makes others dependent upon him by controlling access to information, persons, and instrumentalities” (p. 352). He further states that “power is a function not only of the extent to which a person controls information, persons, and instrumentalities, but also of the importance of the various attributes he controls” (p. 352). As an individual's years of service grow, so does their organizational access and thus their power (Mechanic, 1962).

Mechanic (1962) bases the extent an individual exercises their influence and power on social role theory. It is advantageous for organizations to maintain control over their employees; maintaining a legitimate authority base is the key to this control (Mechanic 1962). A lower level participant will be more likely to “circumvent higher authority” if the person in authority, or their mandate is “regarded as illegitimate” (Mechanic 1962, p. 355). If lower participants want to assert control, they do so by

“circumventing, sabotaging, and manipulating” the “role structure of the organization” (Mechanic 1962, p. 356).

Lower-level participants increase their power by finding ways to “obtain, maintain, and control access to persons, information, and instrumentalities” in order to make supervisors dependent on them (Mechanic 1962, p. 356). A modern-day example of this is the increase in power of computer-savvy staff members, as changes in technology increase organizational reliance on their critical technical skills.

Mowday (1978)

Mowday (1978) discusses the importance of understanding how subordinates use their power sources to influence organizational decision-makers. Mowday contrasts legitimate power with informal power, describing “power and influence” as the “generalized ability to change the actions of others in some intended fashion” (p. 137). In this study, the researcher chose to examine “power motivation, characteristics of the exercise of influence, and influence effectiveness of 65 secondary school principals,” in “organizational decision-making situations,” (Mowday, 1978, pp. 137-138).

Mowday investigated both intrinsic motivators (need for power and need for achievement) and instrumental motivators (probability of a successful attempt and anticipated value of a successful outcome). He also assessed the respondents’ perceptions of power and predicted that “managers with high self-perceptions of power would be more likely to exhibit high power motivation in the work place” (1978, p. 141). Based on a literature review Mowday chose to examine five methods of influence, “(1) threats, (2)

legitimate authority, (3) persuasive arguments, (4) rewards or exchanges of favors, and (5) providing information in such a way that the recipient does not know that he or she is being influenced... the last method of influence was interpreted as manipulation” (1978, p. 142-143). In addition to surveying the managers, Mowday asked immediate supervisors to rate the respondents “influence activity” from “‘well below peers’ to ‘well above peers’” (1978, p. 147). Mowday also took into account situational factors by asking that the respondents indicate perceptions separately for decisions based upon three common organizational decisions, “allocation of budgetary resources,” “classification or promotion of a subordinate,” and “resources to undertake a special project” (Mowday, 1978, p. 145).

Mowday found that “influence activity was significantly related to the measures of motivational force, need strengths, and self perceptions of power” (1978, p. 148).

Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson, 1980, 1988

Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson (1980) conducted two studies where they attempted to categorize intraorganizational influence tactics used to influence the behavior of co-workers, supervisors, and subordinates. In the first study, they asked “165 lower-level managers” to write an essay describing a way they successfully influenced the behavior of a co-worker, supervisor, or subordinate. Based on these essays, the researchers identified 370 influence tactics, which they then sorted into 14 categories (pp. 440-441). In addition to identifying tactics and developing categories, the researchers found evidence that the respondents chose differing tactics, depending on the situation.

The found influence tactics were chosen based on “what the respondents are trying to get from the target person, the amount of resistance shown, and the power of the target person (p. 443).

In the second 1980 study, Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson attempted to decrease category overlap and decrease the number of categories. Using results from the first study, they developed 58 items into a questionnaire with a 5-point scale, and administered the survey to 754 respondents (p.443). Through factor analysis, they identified “eight dimensions of influence” and differences in usage, including: ingratiation, rationality, assertiveness, sanctions, exchange, upward appeal, blocking, and coalitions (p. 448). Respondents chose different influence tactics based on their job status, the size of their work unit, and whether the unit was unionized. They found no difference in tactics utilized based upon the sex of the respondent (Kipnis, Schmidt & Wilkinson, 1980, pp. 450-451).

In 1988, Kipnis and Schmidt reported on three studies that looked at only upward-influence styles, “respondents used items from the Profile of Organizational Influence Strategies Form M)” (p. 529). The researchers used cluster analysis and described four styles of “employee upward-influence styles” that subordinates employ to effect outcomes and to “gain compliance” from superiors (pp. 528-529). They identified three of the styles identified in the 1983 study on managerial influence by Kipnis, Schmidt, Swaffin-Smith, and Wilkinson, Shotgun, Bystander, and Tactician, and added a fourth style, identified as Ingratiator (p. 530).

Shotgun.

Shotgun style individuals exhibit behaviors such as utilizing influence, asserting oneself, and bargaining. They feel they have a lot at stake and employ many different measures to achieve the results they desire.

Bystander.

Bystander style individuals used few attempts to influence their superiors, “Having few objectives, they reported exerting little influence” (p. 529).

Tactician.

Tactician style respondents use their skills and their ability to reason with superiors in order to obtain compliance to their ideas.

The researchers found a correlation between upward-influence styles and performance evaluations. Subordinates who used Shotgun style “received less favorable evaluations than those using other upward-influence styles. There was a gender difference noted; for males, the “highest performance evaluations were given to Tacticians” and for females “the highest performance evaluations were given to Ingratiators in the worker study and to female Ingratiators and Bystanders in the supervisor study” (p. 536).

Ingratiator.

“Ingratiator style individuals “scored high on the friendliness strategy” (p. 530). Findings indicate that “women employees who use little upward-influence or use influence based on ingratiation, may be perceived by male superiors as effectively performing their roles” (p. 540).

One problem with the study was that the data “suggested differences in influence style that were associated with organizational context and personal needs of the employees,” but the research design did not address those differences (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988, p. 532).

Farmer and Maslyn (1999) found “strong support for the existence of” Shotgun, Tactician, and Bystander styles of upward-influence tactics, but found insufficient support for the Ingratiator style (p. 670). Yukl (1990) studied upward, lateral, and downward tactics and did not differentiate between male and female styles.

O’Reilly (1982)

Researchers have found that information is a source of power for individuals in organizations. O’Reilly (1982) investigates the use of information sources by decision-makers. O’Reilly states that “the direct relationship between the quality of information used by decision-makers and decision-making performance has been well-established,” but, he also proposes that information can be “contradictory or vague, available from sources of varying credibility, applicable to a number of tasks being performed, and

available at social as well as economic costs" (O'Reilly, 1982, p. 756). In O'Reilly's discussion about decision-making, he refers to a number of studies that look at individuals' preferences for types of information. O'Reilly emphasizes that a source of information that has provided quality information in the past will likely be used again. On the topic of information, O'Reilly notes that other researchers have found that decision-makers sometimes choose easily accessible information over high-quality information and that they may choose information that "advocates a certain position" (O'Reilly, 1982, p. 758).

O'Reilly hypothesized that higher quality and more accessible information sources will be used frequently. He surveyed 163 county welfare workers to determine their choices of information sources for, "(1) files (handbooks and procedures), (2) updates (memos and newsletters), (3) internal work group (peers and supervisors), and (4) external information sources (others outside the unit and in other organizations)" (1982, p. 761).

O'Reilly found that the data reflected a significant correlation between information quality and usage and between information accessibility and usage. He thus implied, "decision-makers might obtain information from sources, that although frequently used, are recognized as providing lower quality information than sources that might be used with a greater expenditure of effort" (1982, p. 761). After further analysis, O'Reilly found that accessibility of source was the greatest predictor of information use in three of the four information sources studied. O'Reilly found, "It is only in the use of

the group, a highly accessible source to all respondents, that accessibility is not a predictor of frequency of use” (1982 p. 767).

In O’Reilly’s results, he concluded that it was “accessibility, rather than quality,” that more often predicts the source of a decision maker’s information” (O’Reilly, 1982, p. 768). In the case of organizational communication and information, he referred to research on “socially constructed” reality, proposing that information sources that have been judged as accurate in the past may be relied on again, without evaluating the “accuracy of the content” (p. 767-768)

Brass and Burkhardt (1993)

Brass and Burkhardt (1993) proposed two “structural sources of power,” one formal (hierarchical) and one informal. The informal structural source of power Brass and Burkhardt discuss is the “social network approach,” based upon a resource dependency framework (p.444), stating, “People who are able to control relevant resources and thereby increase others’ dependence on them are in a position to acquire power. In addition to increasing others’ dependence on them, actors must also decrease their dependence on others” (pp. 444-445). A central position in an organization’s communication network increases power by increasing others’ dependence on them (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993).

In Brass and Burkhardt’s study, they propose ten hypotheses; the discussion below covers the four that are most relevant to this paper’s topic. The remaining six hypotheses are investigations into mediating, independent and interaction effects.

Based upon prior research Brass uses three measures of centrality, “in-degree measure,” “closeness measure,” and “betweenness” (1993, pp. 445-446). The number of individuals that identify the employee as a central person determines the in-degree measure. Researchers calculate the “closeness measure of centrality” by “summing the lengths of the shortest paths from a focal person to all other persons in the organization” (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993, p. 445). The betweenness measure of centrality is related to “the extent to which a focal person falls between pairs of other persons on the shortest path connecting the pairs” (p.446). Brass and Burkhardt hypothesized that “the in-degree closeness, and betweenness centrality, and hierarchical level in an organization, will be positively related to perceptions of power” (1993, p. 446). They purported that individuals who are in a central position in a communication network participate in the “social construction of reality” and they can “withhold, disclose, and modify information in order to influence others’ perceptions and attributions of power” (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993, p. 447).

In their study, Brass and Burkhardt also looked at behavioral power and influence styles. Based on the 1988 research by Kipnis and Schmidt, they investigated influence factors of, “assertiveness, ingratiation, rationality, exchange, upward appeal, and coalition formation,” and hypothesized that these factors would be “positively related to perceptions of power” (1993, pp. 447-448). Brass and Burkhardt felt that the relationship between structural and behavioral power had not been explored adequately in the past; they hypothesized, “Hierarchical level will be positively related to assertiveness and exchange and negatively related to ingratiation, upward appeal, and coalition formation”

(1993 p. 449). They further proposed, “Network centrality will be positively related to the use of exchange and coalition formation” (1993 p. 449).

The researchers evaluated 75 questionnaires administered to employees at a single federal agency site. They used the “agency’s formal organizational chart” to determine hierarchy positions and used the employee roster to determine social network position. The employee roster was given to all employees and they were asked to circle people they communicated with “as part of the job during a typical week” (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993, p. 454). To determine power perceptions, they asked employees to rank the individuals they circled, on a scale from one to five, “how much influence the person you circled has in the everyday activities of this agency” (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993, pp. 455-6).

Brass and Burkhardt’s results for the first four hypotheses are:

- “Hierarchical level and the in-degree measure of centrality were the most strongly related to power” (p. 457).
- All six influence tactics “were highly intercorrelated and all six related significantly to power” (p. 457).
- “The behavioral tactics of assertiveness and exchange were related to hierarchical level, partially supporting Hypothesis 3” (p. 457).
- “Upward appeal and coalition formation were significantly related to the structural measures of in-degree and closeness centrality, providing only partial support for Hypothesis 4. The predicted relationship between the

centrality variables and exchange (Hypothesis 4) was not supported” (p. 457).

Based on these findings and the findings for the other six hypotheses, the researchers believe that two types of “structural positions” “serve as bases for power,” hierarchical (formal) and network position (informal) (p. 462). Of these two structural types, hierarchical position is the strongest and exists without implementing behavioral influence tactics, while network position requires utilizing specific power tactics. Betweenness centrality was not found to be significant in this study as predicted from past research, but “the interactions of betweenness with upward appeal, coalition formation, and exchange were significantly related to power” (p.462). The authors propose that people who have access to, or control of information can use it to gain power (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993, p. 462).

Researchers have hypothesized and proven participant power outside an organization’s legitimate hierarchical structure. Lower-level participants utilize individual power sources to influence both colleagues and supervisors. The following section examines future research options in the area of organizational power in higher education institutions.

Conclusion

Organizational power researchers investigate formal and informal power systems, subdividing informal power into sub-unit and individual power. In higher education, shared governance and academic freedom influence formal power systems. In an

organization such as a university, lower-level participant power, such as that of academic administrative support staff, can have the potential to influence the day-to-day operations and even the long-term goals and directions that the university takes. Little research has been done to examine how lower-level participant power affects university decisions, functions, and operations.

Chapter 3: Research Design

This study employs qualitative methods to examine perceptions of department chairpersons, Directors of Graduate Studies, faculty, and administrative assistants regarding the utilization of informal power sources by administrative staff and their potential impact on departmental decision-making. Data were collected through interviews with chairs, Directors of Graduate Studies, faculty, and administrative staff at a public research university. A descriptive case study methodology is used to explore the types of informal power possessed and utilized by administrative staff in higher education.

Conceptual Framework

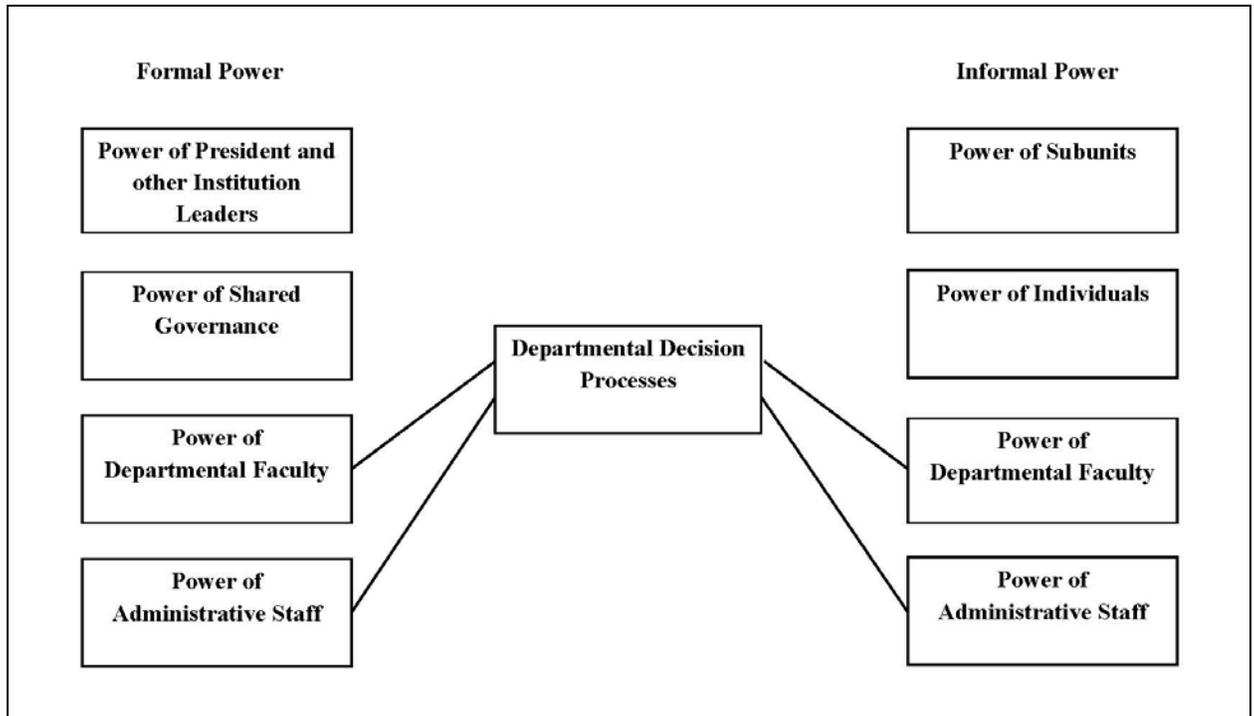
This research is based in political organizational theory: specifically drawing upon previous work on social network theory, bases of power, and lower-level participant power. The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 integrates organizational formal and informal power theories with organizational research conducted in institutions of higher education. Figure 1 indicates most prominent forms of power in higher education and the connecting lines shown indicate the most salient connections to decision-making processes in departments, which is the focus of this analysis.

Organizational power is both formal (hierarchical) and informal. Both individuals and groups control and wield informal power. Organizational formal power in higher

education is shared between presidential leadership and shared governance, with a good deal of power resting in the faculty.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for Decision-making in Academic Departments



Formal Power

In organizational formal power theory, a structural bureaucracy depends on clearly defined purposes, roles, activities, and reporting lines. Bolman and Deal (2003) discuss organizational roles and relationships and state, “clear, well-understood roles and relationships and adequate coordination are key to how well an organization performs” (p. 44). An individual’s formal power depends upon his or her position in an organization’s hierarchical structure. Principles of formal power include a rationally organized structure, levels of formal authority, and task specialization and integration (Bolman, & Deal, 2003; Brass & Burkhardt, 1993).

Formal Power: Power of President and Other Institutional Leaders

Formal power in higher education is vested in presidential leadership. The college or university president is visible as the leader of the institution, but leadership is shared among internal and external constituencies. Externally, presidents serve the institutions’ governing boards that they oversee and they answer to state coordinating or governing boards, the federal government, accrediting agencies, judicial bodies, alumni groups, and the public at large (Birnbaum, 1999, p. 324). Internally, the president oversees and answers to faculty shared governance, collective bargaining units, and student governance (Birnbaum).

The president’s ability to lead constituents is often based on his or her effectiveness as a team player. Birnbaum (1999) notes, “Presidential effectiveness is

based as much upon influence as upon authority, and influence in an academic institution depends upon mutual and reciprocal process of social exchange,” (p. 338).

Formal Power: Power of Shared Governance

Formal power in higher education is also a part of shared governance. College and university governance is shared among governing boards, presidential leadership teams, and faculty. In addition, collective bargaining units, staff, and student associations are all part of institutional governance, but none to the extent of the faculty. Birnbaum (1999) described higher education governance as a joint responsibility that “involves all important campus constituencies, with particular emphasis given to the participation of the faculty” (p. 327). He noted that, in matters regarding or affecting the curriculum, the president is expected to follow the faculty’s lead.

Formal Power: Power of Departmental Faculty

Faculty members have organizational formal power in higher education. College and university presidents have many constituents that affect their power to lead, but the most influential is the faculty.

Academic freedom and tenure support faculty’s formal power in decision-making. In 1940, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of American Colleges adopted the “Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure,” (AAUP Reports & Publications, 2014). The *Statement on Government of Colleges and*

Universities is specific about the relationship between a university president and the faculty, stating that faculty has primary responsibility in areas relating to curriculum and instruction, research, faculty status, and “aspects of student life which relate to the educational process” (AAUP Reports & Publications, 2014).

Formal Power: Power of Administrative Staff

Administrative staff have formal power as delegated to them by the departmental chairperson and as described in their job descriptions. However, there is yet another level of power in this equation; the final informal power discussed is lower-level participant power. In this conceptual framework, discussion is limited to individual influence and tactics, rather than group power. Specifically, higher education, administrative staff power is investigated.

Informal Power

Informal organizational power is power that is outside of an organization’s formal hierarchical system. Both individual organizational members and organizational subunits (e.g., departments) have organizational power. Informal power “organizes around scarce and critical resources” (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977, p. 8). In addition to monetary and budgetary resources, other critical resources include positions, physical space, and allies (Pfeffer, 1994). Decisions on all of these critical resources may be informed by informal power.

Informal Power: Power of Subunits

Informal organizational power is wielded by subunits. Organizations can be broken down into operational sub-units or departments, and imbalances of power can exist between these units. Subunit power, or an individual unit's ability to influence organizational activities, can vary greatly among subunits, based upon resources, organizational centrality, and ability to cope with uncertainty, routinization, and substitutability. Forty years ago, Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, and Pennings (1971) proposed the strategic contingencies theory. They focused on power vested in organizational subunits rather than individuals, proposing that "the division of labor becomes the ultimate source of intraorganizational power, and power is explained by variables that are elements of each subunit's task, its functioning, and its links with the activities of other subunits" (p. 217).

In a university setting, a great deal of scholarship on the effect of informal subunit power, is based upon research on resource allocations among academic departments. In times of stability in enrollments, full-time equivalents, and resources, incremental budgeting based upon precedence is a major factor in departmental allocations. Hills and Mahoney (1978) discussed the budgetary process in higher education and stated, "Only during periods of scarcity of resources will there be competition for resources, competition normally resisted because of its potentially disruptive effect upon the coalition" (p. 455).

Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) and Hills and Mahoney (1978) propose that, in addition to bureaucratic criteria, coalitional criteria reflecting departmental power also

effects resource allocations. Important criteria investigated include proportion of external grants and contracts, committee membership, proportion of graduate students, national reputation, paradigm development, external advisory boards and linkages, centrality, and criticality can all affect departmental power. In addition, Hills and Mahoney (1978) investigate the impacts of resource scarcity or abundance, and Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) explore the impact of departmental size.

Informal Power: Power of Individuals

Another form of informal organizational power is individual power, that is, power that accrues to an individual based on factors outside of the formal hierarchal power structure. Mintzberg (1983) proposes that organizational behavior is a power game based on network position and that individuals seek to influence an organization's practices, policies, decisions, and actions. Influencers who have a central organizational position with access to information can skillfully utilize that information to exercise informal power.

Researchers have found that information is a source of power for individuals in organizations. Information is used as a means to persuade others to act in accordance with an individual's wishes (Feldman & March, 1981; O'Reilly, 1982). One theory of individual power, social network theory, combines Mintzberg's idea of network position with information as a source of power, viewing informational power as it relates to an individual's network position. Brass and Burkhardt (1993) state that "people in central network positions have greater access to and potential control over relevant resources

such as information" (p. 444). Power obtained from a central network position results in a resource dependency relationship, based on the exchange of information. Individuals who are in a central position in the communication network are in a position to "withhold, disclose, and modify information in order to influence others' perceptions and attributions of power," (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993, p. 447).

Researchers have investigated various forms of individual power. In 1959, French and Raven published their classic research on the bases of social power, naming five bases: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert. Following French and Raven, numerous scholars expanded the discussion and research on these five original sources of power and they proposed additional power sources. Lists of bases of power have changed since French and Raven's initial research in 1959. What has remained is the belief that power exists outside of an organizations formal hierarchical structure and that power is not equally distributed among organizational members; rather it is based on members having one or more power bases. Mintzberg (1983) describes five sources of power: control of a resource, control of a technical skill, control of a body of knowledge, legal prerogatives, and access to others who possess one of the other four power sources. Kanter (1979) lists three organizational sources of power: lines of supply, lines of information, and lines of support. Kanter also discusses productive power, a systemic source of power from job activities and political alliances. She proposes that power is inherent in a job designed to allow individual discretion and in jobs that put an individual in close contact with people in authority.

Informal Power: Power of Departmental Faculty

Faculty have a strong influence on departmental decisions and governance. Part of an individual faculty member's power is due to academic freedom, shared governance, and tenure and promotion; but informal principles and political power are also evident in departmental decision-making. Faculty participate in departmental decisions through the shaping and framing of issues; through debate and discussion; and through agreement and dissent. Discussions take place within departmental meetings, committee meetings, and in informal gatherings. In the best of situations this process is conducted with collegiality and respect. This participation can draw upon past precedence and departmental history, sometimes relying on the memories of senior faculty members.

Informal Power: Power of Administrative Staff

Administrative staff hold considerable political power. Mechanic (1962) proposed that informal power comes from dependencies that develop based on one's placement within the organization. His conjecture is that increasing your dependence on someone increases his or her power over you; "within organizations one makes others dependent upon him by controlling access to information, persons, and instrumentalities" (p. 352). He further states that as an individual's years of service grow, so does his or her organizational access and, thus, power (Mechanic, 1962).

Mechanic (1962) proposes that lower-level participants increase their power by finding ways to "obtain, maintain, and control access to persons, information, and

instrumentalities” in order to make supervisors dependent on them (p. 356). A modern-day example of this is the increase in power of computer-savvy staff members, as changes in technology increase organizational reliance on his or her critical technical skills.

Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson (1980) conducted two studies in which they attempted to categorize intraorganizational influence tactics used to affect the behavior of co-workers, supervisors, and subordinates, identifying “eight dimensions of influence” and differences in usage, including: ingratiation, rationality, assertiveness, sanctions, exchange, upward appeal, blocking, and coalitions (p. 448). Respondents were found to choose different influence tactics based on their job status, the size of their work unit, and whether the unit was unionized. The researchers found no difference in tactics utilized based upon the sex of the respondent (Kipnis, Schmidt & Wilkinson, 1980, pp. 450-451). In 1988, Kipnis and Schmidt reported on three studies that looked at only upward-influence styles. The researchers described four styles of “employee upward-influence styles” that subordinates employ to effect outcomes and to “gain compliance” from superiors: shotgun, bystander, tactician, and ingratiator (pp. 528-530). They found that ingratiator style individuals “scored high on the friendliness strategy” (p. 530). Findings also indicate that “women employees who use little upward-influence or use influence based on ingratiation, may be perceived by male superiors as effectively performing their roles” (p. 540).

On the topic of information sources, O’Reilly (1982) notes that researchers have found that decision-makers sometimes choose easily accessible information over high-

quality information and that they may choose information that “advocates a certain position” (p. 758). In O’Reilly’s own research results, he concluded that it is “accessibility, rather than quality” that more often predicts the source of a decision maker’s information” (O’Reilly, 1982, p. 768). In the case of organizational communication and information, he proposed that information sources that have been judged as accurate in the past may be relied on again, without evaluating the “accuracy of the content” (p. 767-768)

Brass and Burkhardt (1993) propose the “social network approach,” based upon a resource dependency framework, stating, “People who are able to control relevant resources and thereby increase others’ dependence on them are in a position to acquire power. A central position in an organization’s communication network increases power by increasing others’ dependence on them” (p. 445). Brass and Burkhardt believe that two types of “structural positions” serve as bases for power, hierarchical and network position. Of these two structural types, hierarchical position is the strongest and exists without implementing behavioral influence tactics, while network position requires utilizing specific power tactics.

Departmental Decision-Making

Departmental consensus and decisions can be sought around many issues. Faculty and, in some cases, professional and administrative staff and graduate assistants can participate in decision-making concerning budgetary, space and other resources. Decisions on curriculum and student concerns are made by the faculty; but no decision

they make is more crucial and at times more contentious than decisions around tenure and promotion. The 1966 Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities discusses tenure and promotion as a joint decision made by the faculty and the leaders of the institution. This joint action is described in the Statement as, “Determinations of faculty status, normally based on the recommendations of the faculty groups involved . . . , but it should here be noted that the building of a strong faculty requires careful joint effort in such actions as staff selection and promotion and the granting of tenure” (AAUP, 2014, p. 137). The 1966 Statement then clarifies the departmental role in the process, stating, “scholars in a particular field or activity have the chief competence for judging the work of their colleagues (AAUP, 2014, p. 139). These principles put this major decision process in the hands of the department faculty. The department’s actions, taken on behalf of the tenure and process, are formal and follow set procedures. Other department decisions can be made formally or informally; involving a full faculty vote or an action by the chair or a departmental leadership team. Departmental decisions impact scarce resources, such as budgets, physical space, positions, and alliances (Pfeffer, 1994).

Framework Connections

It is clear from the research that informal organizational power plays a large role in an institution. Researchers hypothesize that informal power exists outside an organization’s legitimate hierarchical structure and have found that lower-level participants utilize individual power sources to influence both colleagues and supervisors. The focus of the present analysis is on ways in which departmental decisions are

impacted by the formal and informal power of departmental administrative staff (see Figure 1). In particular, this study's research question, "In what ways do administrative staff members utilize informal power to influence departmental decision-making?" examines informal power at the departmental level.

The formal power of departmental faculty plays a large role in departmental decision-making based largely on faculty governance. Faculty members have primary responsibility in areas relating to curriculum and instruction, research, faculty status, and "aspects of student life which relate to the educational process" (AAUP Reports & Publications, 2014). Since these are the main goals and activities of a university department, faculty maintain formal power for decision-making.

Administrative staff have formal power based upon the rights and responsibilities outlined in their position description. In an institution with collective bargaining, staff members' formal power is also detailed in their contract. The lead administrator may be responsible for supervising departmental staff members, purchasing supplies and equipment, hiring student workers, and numerous other tasks.

Informal individual power in higher education also impacts departmental decision-making. As Figure 1 illustrates, departmental decision-making is impacted by the informal power of both faculty members and staff members. Departmental faculty members' informal power impacts departmental decision-making through their individual sources of power. They may have legitimate power, such as a serving as chairperson or Director of Graduate Studies, referent power based on likability or charisma, information

power based on committee memberships, information power, or power from political alliances.

Departmental staff members informal power impacts departmental decision-making by use of what Kalleberg, Wallace and Althausen describe as lower-level participant power or “worker power” (1981, p. 652). Some of their informal power comes from dependencies that develop on their technical skills, their information and knowledge, and the connections they have developed within and external to the department.

Methodology

The objective of this research is to examine in what ways administrative staff members utilize informal power to influence departmental decision-making. The research is based on the proposition that, within a university, use of informal power by academic administrative staff affects departmental decision-making.

The research question addressed utilized qualitative measures to explore perceptions that the utilization of informal power sources by administrative staff impacts departmental decision-making and in what ways. Data collection was conducted through interviews with current and former chairs, Directors of Graduate Studies, faculty, and administrative staff at a public research university. A descriptive case study methodology was used to explore the types of informal power possessed and utilized by higher education administrative staff.

A descriptive case study methodology is chosen for this study because limited research has been conducted on the utilization of informal power sources by higher education administrative staff. Creswell (1998) notes that, “This type of approach may be needed because the topic is new, the topic has never been addressed with a certain sample or group of people, or existing theories do not apply with the particular sample or group under study” (p. 22). Merriam (1998) lists several justifications for choosing a case study methodology, including the ability to “illustrate the complexities of a situation – the fact that not one but many factors contributed to it” and to “evaluate, summarize, and conclude, thus increasing its potential applicability” (pp. 30-31). Merriam states that the use of the qualitative methodology, descriptive case study, provides “a rich ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon under study” and proposes that this research can provide information that can then be used to develop theories (1998, p. 29). Creswell (1998) agrees, stating that the “researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data.” (p. 18).

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through oral interviews with department chairs, Directors of Graduate Studies, faculty, and staff from departments within three colleges or schools. The researcher conducted the interviews in the faculty and staff members’ offices, using a structured interview guide.

Interview procedures based upon Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006) were followed. The researcher sent recruitment emails to individuals selected to be

interviewed. The written request provided the purpose and nature of the study; the researcher's background, training, and interest in the area of inquiry; how the subject was selected to be interviewed; the proposed length of time for interview of 30 to 45 minutes; a request that the interview be recorded; and a confidentiality statement. The correspondence stated that the researcher would follow up with the interviewee by phone or email to arrange a time for the interview. An additional follow-up email was sent to confirm the date, time and location of the interview, and the information sheet for research and an interview questionnaire were attached.

Prior to the interviews the researcher began a face sheet that included: the interviewee's name or code number, date and time of interview, the interviewee's position in the organization, location of the interview, and relevant demographic characteristics. Any information not available prior to the interview was completed at the interview.

The day of the interview, the information provided in the letter and the confidentiality statement were restated, assuring the interviewees that they will be anonymous in reports. The researcher requested permission to tape-record the interview. The researcher asked the interviewees if they had any questions about the research information sheet, which included a brief statement of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study. .

Before beginning the interview, the researcher noted that there are no right or wrong answers and that she was interested in opinions and personal experiences.

Interviewees were encouraged to stop the researcher and ask for clarification of any questions or comments.

The interview guide included items to be sure to ask about, but the items were not necessarily asked in the order listed, depending on the flow of the conversation. Each item was checked off as covered. The researcher checked that all questions were covered, and, if not, asked to go back to any important items missed. A list of secondary, prompting questions were also available for everyone. No questions were asked that were not available for all study participants.

Immediately after leaving the interview, the researcher completed a post-interview comment sheet and detailed field notes. The researcher and in some cases, a transcriptionist employed by the researcher, transcribed tape recordings into type written copy. Word tables based upon the conceptual framework were utilized to organize the materials.

Setting

The study's setting is a major Upper-Midwest research university with a “Doctoral/research university-extensive” Carnegie Classification (http://chronicle.com/stats/carnegie/carnegie_results.php3). The university is a land grant institution in an urban setting. The institution serves over 52,000 students with just over 3,400 full and part-time faculty members. The university is unionized and, in addition to faculty members, there are almost 5,000 professional and administrative staff, over 4,300 civil service staff, and with the addition of labor-represented employees, graduate

assistants, and professionals in training, the institution employs over 22,500 individuals (Institutional Data, 2011).

Procedures for Selecting Subjects

Selection of subjects was purposive, utilizing a single-site, cross-sectional approach. The sample was chosen to provide the most information and the greatest opportunity to gain insight into power as utilized by administrative staff. The data are not generalizable to other institutions (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006; Merriam, 1998).

The sample selection included faculty and staff from departments within three different colleges. Many budgetary and policy decisions are made at the college level, so choosing departments from three different college types broadens the data. The colleges represented a dominant college at this institution, a professional school, and a college located at a separate campus location, representing a smaller, more intimate setting. Three different types of colleges were chosen to represent a wide range of responsibilities by the academic staff. Departments were chosen to provide a variation in size of departments and length of tenure of the administrative staff.

Each department has an administrative assistant, along with additional administrative staff in other staff categories. The researcher contacted the lead staff member for each department (the associate administrator) and requested an interview. If the staff member replied to the request, the researcher confirmed with the administrator that she had been employed by the university for at least five years. After the interview

was scheduled with the associate administrator, the researcher then contacted the current or former chairs, Directors of Graduate Studies, and faculty members to request interviews. In Department 1, the administrative assistant and a former Director of Graduate Studies were interviewed. In Department 2, the administrative assistant, the chairperson, and a former Director of Graduate Studies were interviewed. In Department 3 and Department 4, interviews were obtained from all four employment categories.

Instrumentation

Structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in the offices of the faculty or staff members. These oral interviews were tape-recorded and the researcher took notes during each session.

Pilot Testing

Pilot testing was conducted by interviewing the administrative staff member and a former chair from one academic department. The procedures previously outlined for data collection were followed for pilot testing.

Anticipated Ethical Issues

This research proposal was reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval.

Data Analysis Strategies

The coding structure was defined prior to data collection, based upon the original conceptual framework. Subsequently, these codes were utilized to analyze the data collected and transcribed during the interview period. Coded data were segmented and categorized into themes and patterns that emerged throughout the analysis.

The researcher identified patterns and connections within and between categories, utilizing data matrices. The researcher validated results by having a peer researcher code the data. Codes were compared and 54.9% agreement was found between reviewer codes. After the reviewers met and discussed differences, there was a 2.8% disagreement on coding (5 comments). The comments where disagreement remained were around whether the staff member's supervisory duties were considered formal or legal power. After coding was completed, a descriptive case study methodology was used to explore the types of informal power possessed and utilized by higher education administrative staff.

Conclusions

Qualitative analysis was used to investigate the extent to which the utilization of informal power sources by administrative staff members impact departmental decision-making, and in what ways. Data collection was conducted at a public research university through interviews with thirteen current and former chairs, Directors of Graduate Studies (DGS), faculty members, and lead administrative staff members from four academic

departments. The interviews were transcribed and coded, and the researcher identified patterns and connections within and between categories, utilizing data matrices.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This study examines the research question, “In what ways do administrative staff members utilize informal power to influence departmental decision-making?” The findings presented are based on data collected through oral interviews with department chairs, Directors of Graduate Studies, faculty, and staff from four departments within three colleges or schools at a public research university. The interviews were transcribed and coded, and the researcher identified patterns and connections within and between categories.

This chapter includes a discussion of the characteristics of the research respondents, illustrative narratives describing administrative assistants’ power sources and utilization, and the themes that emerged through data analysis. The power of administrative assistants is also explained through the four domains of departmental decision-making, and around eight formal and informal power sources. In the presentation of data on the formal and informal power of staff members, quotations are included to illustrate the discussion. Ellipses are included for phrases omitted from the quotes, with the exception of words or phrases removed entirely for readability, including repeated phrases and common idioms, such as: “you know,” “sorta,” “sort of,” “um,” “so,” “I mean,” “kind of,” “I guess,” “well,” “like,” “again,” “just,” “kind of,” and “uh.” Pseudonyms were used for all respondent names and the names of individuals identified in quotes. The chapter concludes with a summary of results.

Characteristics of Respondents

Thirteen research interviews were conducted for this research study. The tenure of the four administrative staff members in their current positions as associate administrators varied from 1 to 6 years. These staff members had been working at the university between 10 and 40 years and had been affiliated with their current departments between 10 and 40 years. The administrative assistants described rising through the ranks and taking on increasing areas of responsibility.

The nine faculty members interviewed consisted of six full professors and three associate professors. These faculty members had been affiliated with the university between 6 and 40 years and affiliated with their current departments between 6 and 40 years. Of the nine faculty interviewed, four were current or former chairs and five were current or former Directors of Graduate Studies. Two faculty members were former program area coordinators.

Power of Administrative Assistants: Illustrative Narratives

In order to illustrate the types of power utilized by administrative assistants and the perceptions of departmental staff and faculty members regarding the power utilization, three examples are explored in depth. Mary Taylor's expertise and skills power is discussed and shown to impact departmental decision-making around: space

utilization; equipment, resources, and supplies; and the budgets and grant applications process.

Cathy Wentz's use of information power is examined and shown to impact departmental decision-making around work study students and assistants and the budgets and grant applications process. Janet Armstrong's use of productive power is described and it is shown to impact departmental decision-making around: space utilization; work study students and assistants; equipment, resources, and supplies; and the budgets and grant applications process.

Mary Taylor: Expertise and Skills

In Department 4 the faculty members spoke more extensively about their administrative staff members' skills and expertise than the staff member herself. Mary Taylor's comments related to expertise and skills focused on her expertise with the financial side of her position. When discussing the research enterprise, she described providing financial information to primary investigators during the initial application process and then working with the financial processes after grants have been obtained. She described her expertise as, "After the grant is approved, again I do more of the financial stuff on that, making sure that somebody is paid on that grant for the amount of time they need to be paid, or process any paperwork for reimbursements, paying for things. That kind of thing is what I do." She also described her role in the faculty expense reimbursement process, "... they fill out a form called an employee expense worksheet ... And then they fill it out and give it to me and I verify that they have the

correct figures ... Then I fill in the budget information. ... And then we process it and I sign it and it goes into [a software program] for payment.”

Dr. Madison spoke about the departmental staff member’s expertise regarding budgets, classroom and office scheduling, and equipment management. He described the staff member’s role with equipment as, “We just told her what we needed in terms of equipment, equipment rental, equipment repair, all the materials that we have for various offices or stations, that was the main office and it would be taken care of by the administrative assistant.”

Dr. Russ described the staff member as having fiscal oversight, stating, “I think I look at it more as authority opposed to power. Just because I think it is a positive reframe. So they have authority over, they have fiscal oversight of everything.” Dr. Boyd noted that Ms. Taylor had a major role in expense reimbursement and described her as being “extremely knowledgeable and skillful in terms of getting things done.”

Cathy Wentz: Information Power

In Department 1, Cathy Wentz has historical knowledge that she believes the department depends upon. Due to her years of service, she has information about departmental past practices, successes, and failures. She described her institutional knowledge, and the value of her information to the department:

... because I’ve been here for awhile I see different ideas go around and around and so, you know, I say, ‘This hasn’t worked in the past, doesn’t mean that it

can't work this time, but I just want to tell you about the pitfalls and the whatever has happened in the past ...”

“I can throw out a couple of ideas ... because of my history here in the department ... They'll come in and just ask questions ... I guess it's just all in my head.”

“And so because he's writing this grant, he needs to have all this archival information, and since I've been here awhile I know where a lot of that information is, so I'm helping him on that project.”

Ms. Wentz also described in-depth how her knowledge and information is utilized by the department during the course scheduling process:

“I work with the curriculum all the time ... they ask me to help out.”

“And so some of that stuff, the faculty doesn't understand, and so it's just a matter of knowing the curriculum, knowing that information and advising them about what they can and cannot do.”

“... because I've been here, I understand the number structure, so when people were saying well what are we, what are we going to call this class, and what number are we going to use, and we can't use the numbers we've already used, otherwise it would be really confusing. But it has to be something that fits in with all of the classes that we are offering now and so I just made some suggestions about what the course numbers would be.”

“So I was just in a meeting today where I was in the middle, trying to facilitate the chair's request to have this done, and yet trying to figure out a way that we can work with the prerequisites and ... what step you should take, this class before this class, and how that's going to work. And then I have to worry about how many students are actually

going to enroll for these classes, and whether or not—if you don't have 15 people in a class, the college notices that, and they'll tell us, okay, you can't offer that class. That might affect not only the instructor but if there's a TA for that class. Then what do you do with that? So I was brought in as somebody who was supposed to say, you know I think you're going to have to combine this 3300 with a 5300 class, so that you make it a larger class, more students would be able to register for it and you'd only have to pay one instructor for these ...”

Dr. Thompson noted the knowledge and information that Ms. Wentz has around the faculty search process and the overall scheduling of courses. He described her knowledge in course scheduling as:

“... one of the things that she spent a lot of time doing is the ... schedules of classes, looking at the overall schedule, and trying to insure that the schedules don't run into big conflicts between one area and another. Looking at the overall scheduling. Looking at the overall relationship of the schedule to the number of courses that are out there and available. Who's teaching what at any given time? So that is all essentially managed through her.”

Janet Armstrong: Productive power

The category of coding identified as productive power includes a broad range of descriptors based on the literature, including alliance power, relationship power, individual discretion, job activities, position power, lines of support, and having a seat at the table where decisions are made. In Department 2, Janet Armstrong demonstrates productive power through comments regarding her individual discretion, her seat at the

table where decisions are made, her position and centrality within the department, and, most importantly, her alliances internal and external to her academic department. Interviews with both of the Department 2 faculty members interviewed verify Ms. Armstrong's productive power.

Ms. Armstrong described a change in status from serving as a resource person on the executive committee to a full member with voting rights, demonstrating her seat at the table, alliance, and centrality power. Her comments show her belief that her status and power changed with her recently formalized role on this committee.

“... it means I get to say I'm on the executive committee ...”

“... recently I was offered another position and I stayed here... I did want to formalize that power ... that I think that I do have ..., the chair, the DGS, and I are the ones who work very closely on recommendations to the faculty ..., And so I did ask that I be, sort of, recognized in the way that I'm named to, what we call the executive committee ... I think being on the executive committee of the department ... is significant. It shows ... that ... a staff member is playing a ... integral role in an academic department's decisions.”

Dr. Hanson, the Department 2 chair, commented on Ms. Armstrong's productive power related to her alliance power, job activities power, and lines of support. He described Ms. Armstrong as being the “main counsel to the chair” and stated, “She's my number one.” He also commented on how he collaborates with Ms. Armstrong on space issues: “The person who has all of that on record and sort of refreshes my memory, tells me about it, is my assistant Janet ... giving me the lay of the land in terms of what resources are available in terms of space.” Dr. Hanson also made several comments related to the lines of support the staff member has across the university. He talked about

Ms. Armstrong knowing who to contact if a desk chair broke or if a computer screen burst and her role as the institutional technology contact person for faculty members who are due for new computers. He also spoke about her connections to other staff members within the college and said that in the past, he has asked her to check with her colleagues to find out how the other chairs are responding to the dean's requests.

Dr. Olson commented on productive power related to the Ms. Armstrong's alliance power, individual discretion power, and seat at the table where decisions are made. These comments demonstrate the faculty's close working relationship with Ms. Armstrong and their belief in her ability to perform successfully in her position. In the area of alliance power, Dr. Olson spoke about Ms. Armstrong working with the chair on issues around departmental space, classroom space, teaching assistant assignments, and on managing the equipment and supply budget. She described this alliance as varying depending on the personalities involved, stating, "The chair makes those decisions, you know, a lot of this depends on who's the chair and who's the administrator. When I was chair years ago — every chair operates differently. Some make decisions more themselves, others delegate more to Janet or whoever the Janet person is." She explained that her "power derives from how much the chair turns over to her and how much the faculty endows her with the power."

Dr. Olson also spoke about Ms. Armstrong's productive power from job activities within department operations. She explained, "Almost anytime I have a question about anything whether it's scheduling or ... questions about my accounts, or...questions about procedures, or...questions about room scheduling, or even teaching schedules and time

for assigned classes I would go to Janet.” Dr. Olson also noted that Ms. Armstrong has individual discretion with “day-to-day operations” and in making supply decisions for the department, stating, “But I would imagine Janet handles most of that in consultation with the staff, I don’t think even the chair needs to be involved in that kind of thing.” Dr. Olson also made comments related to the staff member attending department meetings, recognizing productive power for the staff member having a seat at the table.

In Department 2, Ms. Armstrong makes extensive claims to the productive power she holds with the department. Those claims are supported by the chair and the DGS who both support Ms. Armstrong’s productive power within their department. Ms. Armstrong’s productive power comes from alliances, job activities, lines of support, individual discretion, and from having a seat at the table.

This in-depth exploration into three administrative assistants’ utilization of power sources described expertise and skills power, information power, and productive power. The discussion of these individuals and their power sources shows that informal power sources utilized by administrative assistants have the potential to impact departmental decision-making around space utilization, work study students and assistants, equipment, resources, and supplies, and the budgets and grant applications processes.

Emerging Themes

This study’s open-ended questions allowed the researcher to develop themes from the research data (Merriam, 1998). The researcher utilized individual power terms that were described in the initial literature review by theorists reporting on individual power

in organizations. During interviewing, transcribing, and coding, eight primary categories emerged and were utilized in the final coding process. The power terms, theorists, and the final categories are listed in Table 2.

The category of formal power is identified by alternate terms, such as hierarchical and legitimate power. There are no alternative terms associated with the legal prerogative or coercive power categories. Terms and phrases the researcher associated with information power, based on both the interviews and prior research, include lines of information, key positions in communications networks, access to lines of information, control of a body of knowledge, and information due to longevity.

The category of coding identified as productive power includes a broad range of descriptors based on research literature. Access and control of agenda power is obtained through having a seat at the table when decisions are made (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Mintzberg (1983) describes power that comes from having access to individuals who have one or more of the other four sources of power available to them (control of a resource, control of a technical skill, control of a body of knowledge, or legal prerogatives). Kanter (1979) describes lines of support as a power source, meaning the manager has backing from administration. Kanter calls this productive power or systemic sources of power from job activities and political alliances. Kanter proposes that power is inherent in jobs designed to allow individual discretion and in jobs that put an individual in close contact with prestigious people or people in authority. The original sub-coded categories compiled into the category of productive power include political alliances,

access to decision-makers, lines of support, position, job activities/centrality, and individual discretion.

Referent power is described by Bolman & Deal as charisma and likability, and by French & Raven as likability and reliability. Resource power is described as reward power, lines of supply power, and resource control. Skills and expertise is described as expertise and control of a technical skill.

The eight categories in Table 2 emerged during interviewing, transcribing, and coding research interviews. The table includes the eight categories, power terminology, and the theorists associated with the power terms.

Table 2

Emerging Themes

Category	Terms	Literature
Formal	Hierarchical	Weber (1946), Brass & Burkhardt (1993)
	Legitimate	French & Raven (1959)
Legal prerogative	Legal prerogative	Mintzberg (1983)
Coercive	Coercive	French & Raven (1959)
Information	Lines of information	Bolman & Deal (2003)
	Key position in communications network	Bolman & Deal (2003)
	Access to lines of information	Kanter (1979)
	Control of a body of knowledge	Mintzberg (1983)
	Information due to position longevity	Mechanic (1962)
Productive/Position	Productive power	Kanter (1979)
	Position power	Brass & Burkhardt (1993)
	Individual discretion	Kanter (1979)
	Job activities/centrality	Kanter (1979)
	Lines of support	Kanter (1979)
	Political alliances	Kanter (1979), Mintzberg (1983), Bolman & Deal (2003)
	Seat at the table	Bolman & Deal (2003)
Referent	Charisma	Bolman & Deal (2003)
	Likability	French & Raven (1959)
	Reliability	French & Raven (1959)
Resource	Reward	French & Raven (1959), Mintzberg (1983), Bolman & Deal (2003)
	Lines of supply	Kanter (1979)
	Resource control	Kanter (1979), Mintzberg (1983), Bolman & Deal (2003)
Skill and Expertise	Expertise	French & Raven (1959), Mintzberg (1983)
	Control of a technical skill	Mintzberg (1983)

Power of Administrative Assistants by Domains of Departmental Decision-Making

This study's research protocol included interview questions around four domains of departmental decision-making: space utilization; work study students and assistants; equipment, resources, and supplies; and budgets and grant applications. Table 3 outlines the types of administrative staff members' formal and informal power sources that were mentioned by study respondents in relation to these four domains of departmental decision-making. The totals indicate the number of individuals in each category who commented on a power source in regard to the domain. One comment could be coded for more than one power source. Take this administrative assistant comment as an example: "I gather all the information [regarding graduate assistantship allocations], I remind the chair of the criteria, I provide information about their preferences of course and who we have obligations to, ... if there are situations where there are issues about performance in the past, I make sure that the chair is aware of that, if there are issues where there have been bad fits, because fit, for the student and/or fit for the department is also part of our criteria, ... I will provide that information ..." This statement was coded for the work study students and assistants decision-making domain as expertise power, information power, and productive power (for her position centrality and her alliance with the department chairperson).

Table 3

*Types of Formal and Informal Power Mentioned by Study Respondents in Relation to Domains of Departmental Decision-Making **

Domains of Departmental Decision-Making	Responses from Administrative Assistants (n=4)	Responses from Chairs, Directors of Graduate Studies and Faculty (n=9)
Space utilization	Expertise (1) Information (3) Productive (2) Resource (2)	Information (5) Productive (4) Resource (4)
Work study students and assistants	Expertise (3) Formal (1) Information (2) Legal prerogative (1) Productive (3) Resource (1)	Formal (1) Information (1) Productive (4)
Equipment, resources, and supplies	Productive (1) Resource (2)	Formal (1) Information (2) Productive (3) Resource (5)
Budgets and grant applications	Formal (1) Expertise (3) Information (3) Productive (4) Resource (2)	Formal (3) Expertise (3) Information (6) Productive (4) Referent (2) Resource (4)

(* Number in parentheses indicates the number of respondents who mentioned the form of power indicated)

Formal and Informal Power in Higher Education: Departmental staff

The administrative assistant formal and informal power categories that emerged during the interview and analysis process are described in this section. Those power sources include formal, legal prerogative, coercive, expertise and skills, information, productive, referent, and resource.

Each power category includes a description of the power source and a discussion about that power source's impact on the four domains of departmental decision-making: space utilization; work study students and assistants; equipment, resources, and supplies; and budgets and grant applications. Following this description, interview data is used to demonstrate the administrative assistants' use of the formal and informal power sources in departmental decision-making. Administrative staff data is presented first and then faculty data follows.

Administrative Staff: Formal power

Lead administrative staff members have formal power as delegated to them by the departmental chairs and as described in their job descriptions, and in some institutions, as defined by their union affiliation. Within the four departmental decision-making domains, formal power was identified in one administrative assistant's comments in relation to the budgets and grant applications domain, and in one administrative assistant's comments in relation to the work study students and assistants domain. Formal power was identified

in one faculty member's comments regarding the work study students and assistants domain, in one faculty member's comment regarding the equipment, resources, and supplies domain, and in three faculty member's comments regarding the budgets and grant applications domain. This following section examines how staff and faculty discuss the aspects of staff members' positions that relate to formal power within their departmental roles.

All four staff members spoke about their role supervising other departmental staff members. Within the four departments, the number of staff members they supervise is limited, but their supervisory role includes hiring and training staff, providing work assignments, approving leave requests, participating in performance reviews, and dealing with disciplinary issues. In some cases the subordinate's work load is provided by faculty members (directors and coordinators of graduate studies) while the administrative staff member handles the direct supervision. Mary Taylor described this shared supervision: "I supervise them in some respects, and in others their coordinators would help them with their work. We have two people that help the DGS and the coordinator of graduate studies, so it is kind of dual roles. Those two supervisors, they support or supervise the work load and I do the rest of that, you know in sake of vacation or disciplinary issues that would come up, so as I said we have bargaining units and civil service."

Janet Armstrong has the same formal responsibilities as the other staff (supervising staff, etc.), but she recently expanded her formal power within the department to include additional formal rights and responsibilities. Ms. Armstrong

explained that her role on the department's executive committee has been formalized, thus giving her a voice in departmental decisions. She no longer serves only as a resource to the committee; she now has voice and voting rights.

The four staff members identify formal power sources and comment extensively on their role supervising staff. In addition, one faculty member comments on her role signing faculty reimbursements and another staff member has expanded her formal power by requesting and being granted permission to serve on the leadership council as a voting member.

Of the nine faculty members interviewed, eight commented on their departmental staff members' formal power, but overall they commented on this power source to a lesser degree than the staff members themselves. The faculty comments pointed to these staff members as the lead staff member in the departmental office and described their formal responsibilities as supervising other staff members, reimbursing faculty and staff expenses, and maintaining fiscal oversight.

Dr. Nelson (Department 3) spoke about the staff member's formal role in hiring field assistants and student workers: "... the administrative assistant, she does hiring, and we hire lots of people, field assistants, and students, and ... whatever, so she does all that paperwork, and there are other things she does ... but she doesn't do any kind of actual accounting."

When asked about the staff member's power sources, Dr. Russ (Department 4) stated that their staff member has a great deal of individual discretion in the performance of her role, but said she has the knowledge and awareness to know when to consult the

chair. She described their staff member as having authority rather than power and described the responsibilities that come with that authority.

“They [staff members] do a lot of things on their own, thank goodness. If there were questions around fiscal or personnel kinds of things that they need to consult with the chair around, they would know to do that. It’s not like they are doing things that the chair doesn’t know their every move, but they’re things that they should, that they know how to do.”

Dr. Russ described this staff member’s appropriately placed authority as a benefit to the department chair, stating, “So, they have a lot of very appropriately placed authority; which is key, the chair would be absolutely buried if they had to know and track on all of that.”

Twelve of the thirteen respondents commented on the departmental staff members’ formal power. The staff and the DGS commented more extensively than the chairs and faculty and the formal responsibility most often reported was staff supervision.

Administrative Staff Formal Power: Legal prerogatives

Mintzberg (1983) describes formal power from legal prerogatives as “exclusive rights or privileges to impose choices” (p. 354). Legal prerogatives can grant formal power to an organization, including the rights to “hire and fire” and to “issue orders” (p. 354). Legal prerogative was identified in one administrative assistant’s comments in regards to the work study students and assistants domain.

The researcher and the second reviewer differed on coding statements for legal prerogative power. The researcher coded one statement legal prerogatives and the second

reviewer coded six statements as legal prerogatives. Both reviewers agreed that the statements made by the staff member in Department 1 indicated legal prerogative power. In that statement, Ms. Wentz described her role in hiring, initiating, and signing contracts with temporary personnel, which indicates she is contracting with the various student and temporary employees.

“I put it into a program ... ant it puts all that information in, all the financial information, and then it spits out a letter which I give to the person and they have to sign it. It’s their contract.”

The statements where there was a coding disagreement between reviewers centered around the staff members’ roles in supervising employees. The researcher coded those statements as formal power and the second reviewer coded the statements as legal prerogatives.

There were no comments made by faculty members that were coded as legal prerogatives power for administrative assistants.

Administrative Staff Informal Power: Coercive

The first informal power source addressed is coercive power, which is power based upon an individual’s ability to punish someone or to stipulate sanctions because of non-conformance. French & Raven (1959) and Bolman and Deal (2003) identify coercive power as an informal power source. No comments were coded as coercive power that were associated with any of the four departmental decision-making domains.

Only one respondent, Dr. Thompson (former DGS in Department 1) discussed coercive power; he referred to a previous staff member's use of negative power and her ability to subvert others. He stated that the current staff member does not utilize that type of power, but he recognized that individuals seeking power can do things to subvert others in order to gain an advantage. In describing the previous staff member's coercive power, he said, "... the power that one can have is a negative one and she does not have that. I mean the idea of not sharing information or keeping things secret, and she is not the least bit like that. I mean we have had people who were like that in the past. ... People seeking power in a job like that will do things in a job like that to subvert others and we don't have anybody like that anymore."

The other twelve respondents did not comment on staff coercive power, but Dr. Thompson's comments made a strong statement on the negative impact coercive power can have on a department.

Administrative Staff Informal Power: Expertise and skills.

Expert power accrues to an individual who has the expertise or skills needed to solve a current organizational problem or situation. These individuals are respected and deferred to because of their specialized knowledge (French & Raven, 1959). Mintzberg (1983) describes this power source as having control of a critical technical skill. A staff member's skills and expertise can create a dependency if faculty members need their services to successfully achieve their goals.

Of the thirteen respondents, eleven spoke about staff expertise and skills power. Expertise and skills power was identified in one administrative assistant's comments in relation to the space utilization domain, in three administrative assistant's comments regarding the work study students and assistants domain, and in three comments around the budgets and grant applications domain. Expertise and skills power was only identified by faculty around the budgets and grant applications domain, where three faculty members' comments related to expertise around departmental and grant budgets.

The four staff members interviewed all discussed their expertise power in some way, describing an expertise, a skill, or a technical skill. They described expertise and skills in the areas of editing documents, tracking and hiring adjunct and teaching assistants through a specialized computer program, tracking and analyzing data, course scheduling, and finance management. Two of the staff members spoke about having major roles in course scheduling. The second staff member who spoke about her role in course scheduling, Ms. Armstrong, spoke about her expertise in compiling and analyzing data and in managing teaching assistant assignments. While another staff member, Ms. Nelson described her main area of expertise as helping graduate students deal with the university and financial aid red tape. By contrast, the fourth staff member, Ms. Taylor, spoke more about her expertise with the financial end of her position. When talking about the research enterprise, she spoke about providing financial information to primary investigators during the initial grant application process and helping with the financial process after a grant has been obtained. It is apparent that the four staff members perceive their expertise and skills as important to their department, but their skills are

being utilized in different ways between the four departments, most likely depending on the needs of the academic programs and faculty members.

Seven of the nine faculty members interviewed spoke about the departmental staff members' skills and expertise in performing their roles. Areas where faculty commented on the staff's skills and expertise were course and space scheduling, hiring adjunct and graduate assistants, and budget and fiscal oversight.

In Department 4, Dr. Madison described the staff member's expertise with departmental space as influential and said, "I think the ... lead administrator would be someone with whom the chair would consult [about space]. I certainly did when I was chair ... in fact I generally relied on my administrative assistant to know what the space needs were at the moment. She was helping with ... whatever classroom space we actually had that was available to us as a department, as well as office space, and she would seriously be right up-to-date on ... who was coming and going and different roles ... I am going to say that person was influential." Dr. Boyd described this staff member as having skills that helped the department meet their goals. He described their staff member as "extremely knowledgeable and skillful in terms of getting things done."

In Department 2, when asked what she felt was the staff member's basis of power within the department, Dr. Olson replied, "... first of all her own ... skills and experience ..."

The staff members' expertise and skills are recognized by the majority of the respondents. Although the areas of expertise varied between departments, the staff expertise most often referred to by the respondents was in course scheduling.

Administrative Staff Informal Power: Information

Mintzberg (1983) describes information power as control of a critical “body of knowledge” (p. 354). Kanter’s (1979) description of power from lines of information is comparable to Mintzberg’s control of a body of knowledge and Bolman and Deal (2003) state that power is obtained from having information people seek. Information power can be a critical power source if an individual in a central network position chooses to withhold or modify information. When coding for information power sources, control of information, lines of information, and institutional knowledge were included. Numerous comments mentioned the staff member’s value based on her knowledge of how the institution and department work and historical knowledge of past policies, practices, and occurrences.

Information power was identified in one administrative assistant’s comments in relation to the space utilization domain, in two administrative assistants’ comments in relation to the work study students and assistants domain, and in three administrative assistants’ comments in relation to the budgets and grant applications domain. Information power was identified by five faculty members’ comments in relation to the space utilization domain, in one faculty member’s comments in relation to the work study students and assistants domain, in two faculty members’ comments in relation to the equipment, resources, and supplies domain, and in six faculty comments in relation to the budgets and grant applications domain. The following sections examine how the administrative staff and the faculty discuss the aspects of staff members’ job duties and how they relate to information power within their departments.

The four staff members each made several comments noting information power and they all described their length of service as contributing to their departmental and institutional knowledge. The ways they utilize their knowledge and information differed between departments. The first staff member describes her years of service and institutional knowledge, and describes how it helps her provide information on course scheduling, grant information, and other advice. Ms. Wentz spoke extensively about her years of service in the department and attributed her historical knowledge to her longevity, which gives her an understanding of practices that have been tried in the past and failed. She also discussed how this departmental knowledge helps her provide input into the curriculum numbering system and aids her ability to suggest changes to improve course scheduling. Ms. Wentz described a recent situation where she was able to provide historical data to a faculty member writing a grant. Ms. Wentz also stated that her institutional knowledge provides her with the information she uses to provide answers and advice to the students, faculty, and the chair. As far as information access, Ms. Wentz has access to budget details when she edits materials for the chair, signifying lines of information.

Ms. Armstrong spoke also about the longevity she has within her department and compares that to the time period faculty serve as chairs. She believes this longevity contributes to her institutional knowledge and she sees that as a basis for her ability to provide advice to the faculty. She describes the information that she has access to in comparison to the chair's information in the statements below.

“... over thirteen years [working at the university] ... I’ve had this job, the administrator position, for probably ... twelve of the fourteen, thirteen, fourteen years, almost the whole time.”

“I’ve worked for, been the administrator for five chairs.” “... chairs are usually three years at the university, but often they’re renewed, but our faculty don’t renew their chairships very often. So I’ve had five different supervisors in less than fifteen years, which means I have thirteen years of information about space and how it’s used and a chair at any given time has had up to three and half.

Ms. Armstrong also discussed the significance of information she provides to the chair and the department faculty. She describes information she supplies as being needed to make decisions around allocating graduate assistantships, course offerings, office space, and departmental budget. She stated, “I measure and analyze enrollment trends...” “I’m the one who says this is the money we have ...,” “I lay out the pros and cons of the different space configurations...” “... the chair of the department, allocates based on available funds, so based on information that I help prepare...”

While Ms. Nelson, the third staff member, comments on her longevity and institutional knowledge within the department, she describes this aspect of her position to a lesser degree than the other staff members. She also describes this attribute as less of a service to the faculty, but more as giving her knowledge to aid graduate students in dealing with institutional bureaucracy. She did discuss her role in tracking and allocating space and in tracking the budget, although there is now a finance team that handles the actual budget process.

Ms. Taylor, the fourth staff member, discussed her longevity in relation to the institution rather than the department and attributed the information she has obtained over

the years to being able to better serve her department. In the comments below, she describes how this institutional knowledge provides her with contacts across the university:

“I have been at the university for 20 — almost 24 years.” “But yes, 24 years and then of advancing responsibilities, or positions.”

“I know people who to call that I could get the answers, for certain people.”

“... you learn in the different areas of the university, who to contact, what areas there are, and you start making a network of people, which is actually what you need to survive in the university.”

“... you really have to have an idea [of who to call for assistance], and the only way you can get a lot of that knowledge is by solving problems. And figuring out, making phone calls, and pretty soon you’ll get on to the office that solves this or that or whatever. But it can take a while and it takes a long time to get that history.”

“[Knowing the history] ...you would need to be here for a while before you step into these positions, because you do have to get an idea of the bigger university picture.”

Ms. Taylor also described the types of information she provides to department faculty, including budgetary information for the grant process, and finding facts and figures for departmental decisions. All four staff members have institutional knowledge, but they describe very different ways of utilizing that information within their departments.

Eight of the nine faculty interviewed commented on staff information power. In Department 2, Dr. Hanson commented on the staff member’s ability to provide information on space, scheduling, equipment, and furnishings, based on her departmental

longevity and her institutional memory. He mentioned appreciating the staff member's institutional memory in regards to past chair and dean interactions and also stated that the staff member's connections to her colleagues enables him to gain perspectives from other department chairs, through the staff members. Dr. Olson stated that Ms. Armstrong would sit in on departmental meetings and provide "information that the chair doesn't have readily available." She said that Ms. Armstrong had historical knowledge about the department and she would go to her for information. She commented, "Almost anytime I have a question about anything, whether it's scheduling or questions about my accounts, or questions about procedures, or questions about room scheduling, or even teaching schedules and time for assigned classes, I would go to Janet."

In Department 3, Dr. Jones briefly spoke about the staff member's ability to track and pull together budget and space information. She said, "I'd say, you know, what do you think, what budget should we do this—even though she doesn't handle budgets, she knows what's going on." Dr. Erickson made one comment related to the staff member's information power, stating that he would count on the departmental staff member to provide him with information about the budget.

In Department 4, Dr. Madison commented on the value of the information the staff member had regarding departmental space needs and the classroom and office space currently available to the department. Dr. Boyd described the departmental staff member's institutional longevity as giving her important information about how the university works. Dr. Russ was effusive in her comments about their staff member's information power. She explained that if she wanted information on budget she would go

to Ms. Taylor. She also said besides budget, she would go to the staff member for numerous other questions. The statements below show the DGS' appreciation for their staff member's institutional knowledge and information.

"...she [current staff] does a lot of stuff for us, because she knows the people, she has the relationships, which always helps with getting things done. But, so, Mary is actually someone that I go to a lot to run things by her."

"So if they are infrastructure kinds of things. Who to contact about a health care thing? How much money is in my professional development account? Can you tell me again what the procedure is for that? ... those kinds of things that aren't related to the core faculty work. Mary [staff member] knows all of that."

"... if I have a question about not something that is programmatic, maybe that's a funding related thing or a procedure related thing, personnel related thing, or something, I would go to, well either Beth [chair] or Mary [staff member]. If it is a process kind of thing I would probably go to Mary because she would know what the process is. And then she would either know the answer or she would know who to contact in the dean's office to get the answer."

Twelve of the thirteen respondents made comments coded for information power. All administrative staff, in addition to several faculty respondents, commented on the value of institutional longevity providing knowledge and information to aid the departments and programs.

Administrative Staff Informal Power: Productive

The category of coding identified as productive includes a broad range of descriptors based on the literature. Productive power comments, including alliance

power (access to decision makers), relationship power, individual discretion, job activities, position power, lines of support, and having seat at the table, were the most often identified of all the categories coded.

Productive power was identified in two administrative assistants' comments in relation to the space utilization domain, in three administrative assistants' comments in relation to the work study students and assistants' domain, in one administrative assistant comment around the equipment, resources, and supplies domain, and in four administrative assistants' comments in relation to the budgets and grant applications domain. Productive power was identified in four faculty members' comments in relation to the space utilization domain, in four faculty members' comments in relation to the work study students and assistants' domain, in three faculty members' comments in relation to the equipment, resources, and supplies domain, and in four administrative assistants' comments in relation to the budgets and grant applications domain. The following sections examine how staff and faculty discuss the aspects of administrative assistants' job duties relate to productive power within their departments.

All four staff members made comments suggesting alliance power based upon their close working relationships with the department chairs, for the most part, and to some extent, with the other faculty members. Ms. Wentz (Department 1) commented on her ability to provide input and to offer ideas to the chair and described her role as a facilitator and an advisor.

“I have my own ideas and she always talks to me about them and wants to know if this is off the wall or if this is something that — and because I've been here for a while I see different ideas go around and around and so, I say this hasn't worked

in the past, doesn't mean that it can't work this time, but I just want to tell you about the pitfalls and the whatever has happened in the past. So that's basically what I serve to her is sort of a facilitator and also an advisor."

Ms. Wentz also spoke about faculty members coming to ask questions because of her longevity and history in the department. Ms. Armstrong described collaborating with the chair on space, stating, "I lay out the pros and cons of the different space configurations and then I mean ultimately the chair's going to decide on things like that." She described advising on the budget because, "I'm the only one who has the history of the budget..." She stated that decisions are a "very collaborative process with me and all the chairs."

Ms. Nelson discussed her close working relationship with the chair, saying, "Roberta [chair] and I are pretty informal in general, and we always talk about things." Ms. Taylor described herself as being the initial faculty contact and the liaison to the chair, stating, "A lot of times I'm the one that gets the request and I can talk it over with the chair, about what we are going to do or not."

In addition to productive power through alliances, all four staff members commented on productive power through job activities. Three staff members described major roles in scheduling courses, classrooms, and other departmental spaces. All four staff described roles in the process and paperwork for hiring faculty members, graduate assistants, and/or professional and administrative staff.

In addition, individual staff made comments on other areas where their job activities gave them a central position within the department. Ms. Taylor stated that she is involved in providing details for faculty writing grants, handling the hiring and payroll

paperwork for the 40-50 graduate assistants, and facilitating the chair's work. She also spoke about her role in approving faculty expense reimbursements and handling the financial aspects of external grants.

Ms. Wentz commented on her job activities being central to the department. She described her role facilitating what the chairs want to accomplish during their terms. Another staff member, Ms. Armstrong, commented on job activities' power for her role in scheduling courses and the hiring process. She also discussed her role as a facilitator faculty work. She stated, "I tell people who work here [colleagues in other departments]. I say, our job is to facilitate the faculty's work ... and I say we do that by really measuring, paying attention, trying to understand what they need, not what they say, what they need." "The faculty in our department really are focused on research and teaching ... They're happy to do the leadership, but they're not overly interested in bureaucracy and administration."

Two staff members made comments on productive power based on having a seat at the table where decisions were made. Ms. Wentz spoke about being part of the team that met to plan the departmental budget and Ms. Armstrong spoke about being a voting member of the department's executive committee. In addition, three staff members commented on productive power through individual discretion. Ms. Wentz spoke about being able to advise students who call with course questions and Ms. Armstrong said she makes the final decisions on purchasing office supplies. Ms. Taylor spoke about her authority to sign off on faculty expense reimbursement forms. One of the staff members noted productive power through lines of support. Ms. Taylor provided several examples

of knowing who to contact across the university to help meet the needs of the faculty in her department. She stated, “I know people, who to call [so] that I could get the answers, for certain people.” All four staff members commented extensively on their productive power through alliances, job activities, individual discretion, and through having a seat at the table where decisions are made.

Eight of the nine faculty members interviewed commented on the departmental administrative assistants’ productive power. All three chairs interviewed made comments related to the staff having close working relationships with the chairpersons themselves. They discussed the information they relied upon staff members to provide, the counsel they sought, and the numerous departmental items they discussed with the staff members. Some specific areas they mentioned as relying on administrative counsel included budget issues and space management. In addition, four of the five other faculty commented on the departmental staff member’s productive power through their alliances. Dr. Thompson (Department 1) discussed their staff member’s role in assisting the chair and Dr. Erickson (Department 3) explained that any power derived by the staff member was dependent upon how much the chair was willing to turn over to the assistant. Dr. Russ (Department 4) described their staff member’s alliance power, explaining that the chair and staff member worked “very closely” together. In addition one of the DGS made comments about his DGS staff member’s alliance power.

Comments concerning productive power through position/centrality/job activities power were made by seven faculty members. In Department 1, Dr. Thompson commented on the central position the staff member plays in the faculty hiring process,

stating that the staff member is “essentially responsible for preparing all the documents, communication with HR, communication with the dean’s office and so on, through the search committee.” He further explained, “she also ... will handle things with the search, for example arranging for candidates to come in ...” In addition, Dr. Thompson commented on the staff member’s job activities and central position related to scheduling courses and classes.

In Department 2, Dr. Hanson spoke about the department faculty going to the staff member for new computers and equipment, replacement furniture, resources and supplies, and for answering general questions, and Dr. Olson discussed Ms. Armstrong’s role in scheduling classrooms and organizing space.

Faculty in Department 3 also commented on their staff member’s position/centrality/job activities power. Dr. Jones spoke about the department’s reliance on the staff member for hiring, course scheduling, and assigning graduate assistant space, and Dr. Erickson spoke about Ms. Nelson’s roles as head of the office and staff supervisor.

The Department 4 faculty also commented about this aspect of productive power. Dr. Madison spoke about the staff member being involved in purchasing, expense reimbursements, and equipment updates. Dr. Russ and Dr. Boyd spoke about Ms. Taylor’s role in reviewing and approving faculty expense reimbursement requests, and Dr. Boyd stated that Ms. Taylor has a role dealing with the college finance office regarding grant finances.

In Department 2, Dr. Hanson commented on the staff member having a seat at the table where decisions are made as a member of the executive committee. The executive committee includes the chair, DGS, and staff member. Dr. Olson also noted that Ms. Armstrong had a seat at the table, attending their departmental meetings and providing information the chair did not have readily available.

In Department 4, Dr. Madison commented that their staff member was a part of the leadership team where decisions were made, but that she was there as a resource and not a voting member. Dr. Boyd also recognized their staff member's productive power in the area of having a seat at the table where decisions are made. He discussed Ms. Taylor's role in attending department meetings and working with the chair, DGS, and coordinator of graduate studies on allocating support dollars for doctoral students.

In Department 2, Dr. Hanson commented on their staff member having lines of support through her university contacts and knowledge of who to contact for resources and to solve faculty problems. The comments Dr. Russ (Department 4) made on lines of support were in regards to the staff member knowing "who to contact in the dean's office to get the answers," along with having relationships with individuals across the university to get things done.

In Department 2, Dr. Olson comments about individual discretion were regarding the staff member's handling of "day-to-day operations" and purchasing supplies as needed without involving the chair.

Twelve of the thirteen respondents recognized staff productive power. The aspect most commented on was alliance power, based on the staff member's working

relationship with the department chairperson. In addition, comments were made related to job activities, individual discretion, lines of support, and having a seat at the table where decisions are made. Staff members provided more comments on their productive power than the other role groups.

Administrative Staff Informal Power: Referent

French and Raven (1959) described one of their five sources of power as referent power, which is based on an individual's likability or charisma. Faculty members from two of the four departments made comments related to referent power.

Referent power was identified in two faculty members' comments regarding the budgets and grant applications domain. This section examines how the four respondent groups discuss the aspects of staff members' positions that relate to referent power within their departmental roles.

Three of nine faculty members interviewed made comments concerning referent power. Dr. Russ (Department 4) spoke about the positive aspects of both current and past staff members' personalities, which, she believed, enhanced their role in the department. She said, "So, they're very key people. Both of those folks [current and former staff members] got along well with everyone and were clear about the kinds of things that they can do." In referring to the current staff member, she also stated, "She is very responsible, in terms of getting things done quickly." Dr. Boyd spoke about Ms. Taylors's formal roles in signing off on expenses and purchases and in supervising staff. He complimented the staff member as he described her supervisory role: "She also has a

good human touch, I think, as far as being able to be an effective supervisor, of other staff members in our department.”

Three faculty members made comments that were coded for administrative assistant referent power. There were no comments made by administrative assistants coded as administrative staff referent power.

Administrative Staff Informal Power: Resource

In coding resource power comments, the researcher included three terms used by various researchers: resource power, reward power, and lines of supply. These terms are linked as they all provide positive outcomes for an individual, group, or organization. Mintzberg (1983) describes control of essential, non-substitutable resources as a power source and lists these as “materials, money, resources to distribute as rewards, and perhaps even prestige” (p. 344). Kanter’s (1979) description of power from lines of supply is comparable to Mintzberg’s control of an essential resource, although she does not specifically mention rewards. Kanter describes lines of supply as the ability to influence the outward environment in order to bring in the resources needed to accomplish tasks. French and Raven (1959) described reward power as power based on an individual’s capacity to provide rewards. Reward power is based upon someone’s ability to give special considerations.

Resource power is an area where most respondents recognized staff power. Eleven of thirteen individuals interviewed commented on their departmental staff member’s resource, reward, or lines of supply. Resource power was identified in two

administrative assistants' comments in relation to the space utilization domain, in one administrative assistant's comments in relation to the work study students and assistants domain, and in two administrative assistants' comments in relation to the budgets and grant applications domain. Resource power was identified in four faculty members' comments in relation to the space utilization domain, in five faculty members' comments in relation to the equipment, resources, and supplies domain, and in four faculty comments in relation to the budgets and grant applications domain. The following sections examine how staff and faculty discuss the aspects of administrative assistants' job duties as they relate to resource power within their departments.

Three of the four staff interviewed made statements relating to resource power. Ms. Wentz is responsible for hiring graduate assistants to teach classes. In contrast, Ms. Armstrong spoke about making decisions around remodeling facilities and computer and equipment purchases. She also said that she advises on the departmental budget. Other staff members are also responsible for budgetary items. Ms. Taylor spoke about reviewing and approving faculty and staff expenses. She also replied to a question about how decisions are made around equipment resources and supplies by saying, "A lot of times I'm the one that gets the request and I can talk it over with the chair, about what we are going to do or not" and "Normally, I just buy what I want, but if it is expensive then I go to the chair." The three staff members demonstrated resource power in their comments, but it is clear they each perceive their power to be in differing areas, such as hiring, purchasing supplies and equipment, approving expense and more.

The majority of faculty members (8 out of 9) commented on staff resource power, but as with the staff members, their comments demonstrate that the areas of resource power can differ among departments. In Department 1, Dr. Thompson spoke about Ms. Wentz's role in hiring graduate students to teach classes, which she then also schedules. In Department 2, Dr. Hanson spoke about their staff member managing space and Dr. Olson spoke about the staff member as working with the chair to allocate space, equipment, and supplies, and to manage the departmental budget.

In Department 3, Dr. Jones spoke about the staff member managing space and making decisions around computers, equipment, and supplies. Dr. Perkins also commented on Ms. Nelson's role in managing space, describing her role in assigning work and office space for graduate assistants.

In Department 4, Dr. Madison spoke about the staff member making decisions around computers, equipment, and supplies, and he also commented on the staff member being authorized to purchase using the department credit card. Dr. Boyd described Ms. Taylor as having a role in approving faculty expense reimbursements for travel allotments and grant expenditures. He also described her as being a part of the group that meets to decide on financial support for doctoral students. Dr. Russ also spoke about Ms. Taylor's role in purchasing supplies and equipment, in expense reimbursements, and in the departmental budget. In commenting about the budget, she described the staff member as having a major role in oversight. She stated, "So they have authority over, they have fiscal oversight of everything. They do a lot of things on their own, thank goodness. If there were questions around fiscal or personnel kinds of things that they

need to consult with the chair around, they would know to do that. It's not like they're doing things that ... they are doing things that the chair doesn't know their every move, but they're things that they should, that they know how to do."

The majority of the respondents commented on administrative assistant resource power. It is apparent that perceptions around which resources administrative assistants impact varied between departments.

Power Utilization and Willingness

Administrative staff can have access to formal and informal sources of power, but power without the willingness to attempt to influence the work environment is meaningless. Brass & Burkhardt (1993) described power as being dependent upon strategic action" (p. 462). They stated that individuals "differ in abilities, skill, and willingness to use those skills and abilities to acquire and exercise power."

Power can be utilized in a positive or negative way. In Department 1, Dr. Thompson (former DGS) provided the sole description of negative power wielded by a former staff member. He described this former staff member as withholding information and commented, "... the power that one can have is a negative one and she [current staff member] does not have that. I mean the idea of not sharing information or keeping things secret, and she is not the least bit like that. I mean we have had people who were like that in the past. And so oftentimes people seeking power in a job like that will do things to subvert others and we don't have anybody like that anymore."

Ms. Armstrong, the Department 2 staff member, describes her power and her willingness to use that power in a positive manner. She also discusses how she mentors colleagues in other departments to utilize the power inherent in their positions. In Ms. Armstrong's statements regarding her willingness to take on decision-making power, she also explains that power belongs to faculty, but they cede some of that power because most of them chose their careers to teach and do research. Ms. Armstrong's statements below testify to her belief in the decision-making power that she has in her own department and she believes other staff members can have in their departments.

"I think staff can always have that informal power."

"We all have the potential to have power, whether it be informal or formal, it probably starts out informally, but, you know, show them what you can really do well, take that burden off of them, because, you know, if faculty choose — I mean maybe they change their minds, but they all choose to come here to do research and do teaching. Not to do paperwork, or decide if the class should be twelve or fifteen. So learn something, take care of it, they trust you, they rely on you, there's your power,"

"I think it's [basis of power] the knowledge and experience, my desire to really measure and analyze the needs of this department, my willingness to — I mean, I do not have a problem with — the faculty have a lot more power than I do, I just have all I need ..."

"My friend who says it's only the power the faculty gives — no, we work hard, we become experts at something, and they rely on us for that, they will give us that power, it will be — I mean recognize that they're also giving us work at the same time ..."

"... really look at what the needs are, not just the stated needs, but what they are, really try to measure what's important ..." "... really identify what their

important needs are, and you fulfill them, then you begin to play a more important role in decision-making. Then people come to you and say, ‘what should we do?’”

Statements by Dr. Thompson and Ms. Armstrong clearly demonstrate the willingness of a staff member to utilize power. Informal power can be wielded positively or negatively; either supporting a department’s successes, or disrupting their activities.

Summary

In this chapter comments made by thirteen respondents were described in relation to the research project’s conceptual framework, which is based upon political organizational theory, bases of power, and lower-level participant power. Comments related to formal and informal power sources of departmental faculty members were discussed in relation to the four departmental decision-making domains: space utilization; work study students and assistants; equipment, resources, and supplies; and budgets and grant applications.

Productive power and information power were the forms of staff power that stood out as the most often cited; these two power sources also showed the greatest potential to impact departmental decision-making. The aspect of productive power with the most impact on departmental decision-making is that of alliance power. Staff and faculty alike noted the access that administrative assistants have to person’s in power, most notably the department chairpersons. Productive power was shown to impact all four departmental decision-making domains.

Information power (often from longevity derived institutional knowledge) is also shown to have potential to impact on departmental decisions. Numerous faculty and staff commented their departmental administrative assistant's information power, based on her knowledge of how the institution and department work and on historical knowledge of past policies, practices, and occurrences.

Chapter 5 will discuss research results, draw conclusions based upon results, and discuss the implications of the findings. It will also discuss the study's limitations and provide suggestions for future research.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

This study examined the role of administrative staff informal power sources in university academic departments. The research is based in political organizational theory and draws upon studies on social network theory, bases of power, and lower-level participant power. Mechanic (1962) proposed that lower-level participants wield considerable power, beyond their formal position. This study investigates whether this proposition extends to administrative staff members in a university setting. The conceptual framework was developed by integrating organizational formal and informal power theories with organizational research conducted on institutes of higher education.

The research question, "In what ways do administrative staff members utilize informal power to influence departmental decision-making?" examined informal individual power at the departmental level. To address this question, qualitative measures were employed to test perceptions of department faculty and staff members regarding utilization of informal power sources by administrative staff members and the potential impact on departmental decision-making. Data was collected through interviews with chairs, DGS, faculty, and administrative staff at a public research university, utilizing a structured interview guide. A descriptive case study methodology was used to explore the types of informal power possessed and utilized by higher education administrative staff.

Chapter Five is organized into six sections: summary of findings, implications for theory, implications for practice, limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and study conclusions.

Summary of Findings

This study examined informal power sources available to administrative staff members in public university academic departments. The research question examined whether informal power sources provide administrative staff members with the potential ability to influence behavior, either through formally sanctioned power or through the use of informal power sources. The study further examined whether the utilization of that power by staff members impacts departmental decision-making and, if so, in what ways. The data presented in chapter four examined the study results through illustrative narratives, emerging themes, the power of administrative assistants examined through four departmental decision-making domains, eight formal and informal power sources available to academic staff, and the implications of willingness to utilize power.

Administrative staff power

This section on administrative staff power summarizes the results discussed in chapter four. The eight power sources (formal power, legal prerogative power, coercive power, expertise and skills power, information power, productive power, referent power, and resource power) are examined and discussed in relation to the four domains of departmental decision-making included in the research interview instruments: space utilization; work study students and assistants; equipment, resources, and supplies; and budgets and grant applications.

Formal power.

Lead administrative staff members have formal power as delegated to them by the departmental chair and as described in their job descriptions, and in some institutions, as defined by their union affiliation. All four respondent roles (chairs, DGS, faculty, and staff) discussed the staff members' formal power within the department as a legitimate function of the position.

Twelve of the thirteen respondents commented on the departmental staff members' formal power. The formal responsibility most often reported was staff supervision. Twelve of the thirteen respondents (4 staff, 4 chairs, 4 DGS and 1 faculty) spoke about the lead staff member's role in relation to supervising other staff members within the department. One staff member spoke about supervising staff members, but discussed sharing that supervisory role with the director and coordinator of graduate studies. Additional formal duties cited were approving faculty expenses, being the lead person in the office, managing the hiring process, having authority and responsibility over fiscal and procedural issues, and, in one case, serving as a voting member on the department's leadership council.

Legal prerogatives.

Mintzberg (1983) describes formal power from legal prerogatives as "exclusive rights or privileges to impose choices" (p. 354). The researcher and the second reviewer differed when coding statements for legal prerogative power. The researcher identified

only one statement as legal prerogative and the second reviewer identified six statements as legal prerogatives. The statement that both reviewers agreed indicated legal prerogative power was made by a staff member who described initiating and signing contracts when hiring temporary personnel, indicating that she is signing legal contracts with the various student and temporary employees. This statement indicated that legal prerogatives power influenced departmental decision-making concerning the work study students and assistants domain.

The statements where the coding differed between reviewers centered on the staff members' roles in supervising employees. The researcher coded those statements as formal power and the second reviewer coded them as legal prerogatives.

Coercive power.

French & Raven (1959) and Bolman and Deal (2003) identify coercive power as power based upon an individual's ability to punish someone or to stipulate sanctions because of non-conformance. Only one respondent from one department noted staff coercive power. A former DGS referred to a previous staff member's ability to sabotage others by the use of negative power. While describing this previous staff member, Dr. Thompson recognized that an individual's seeking power can subvert others in order to gain an advantage. The other twelve individuals interviewed did not make comments that identified the use of coercive power.

Expertise and skills power.

Expert power accrues to an individual who has the expertise needed for a current organizational problem or situation. These individuals are respected and deferred to because of their specialized knowledge (French & Raven, 1959). A staff member's skills and expertise can create a dependency if faculty members need their services to successfully achieve their goals.

Of the thirteen respondents, eleven spoke about staff expertise and skills power. The expertise most often referred to by the respondents was in course scheduling. The respondents described additional staff expertise and skills in editing documents, hiring temporary employees and teaching assistants, tracking and analyzing departmental data, space management, budget management, and fiscal oversight.

In two departments, the staff members commented more extensively than the faculty members about the staff's expertise and skills. In one department, two faculty members spoke extensively about their DGS staff members' expertise, rather than discussing the departmental staff member. In the fourth department the faculty members commented more extensively than the staff member did about her expertise and skills. The faculty in this fourth department may depend more on their staff members' skills to successfully achieve their goals than the other three departments.

Information power.

Mintzberg (1983) describes information power as control of a critical “body of knowledge” (p. 354). Kanter’s (1979) description of power from lines of information is comparable to Mintzberg’s control of a body of knowledge and Bolman and Deal (2003) state that power is obtained from having information people seek. Information power can be a critical power source if an individual in a central network position chooses to withhold or modify information. When coding for information power sources, control of information, lines of information, and institutional knowledge were included.

Numerous comments noted the value of the staff members’ historical knowledge of past departmental policies, practices, and occurrences. The ways in which staff utilize their knowledge and information differs between departments. The staff members’ comments on information power exceeded the comments made by the other role groups.

Institutional knowledge provides staff members with insight into practices that have been tried in the past and failed, and allows them to provide advice to students and faculty. Specific areas where respondents felt staff institutional knowledge benefited departments included course scheduling, graduate assistantship allocations, departmental space tracking and management, and the departmental budget process. In addition, several respondents commented on institutional knowledge providing staff members with contacts across the institution. One staff member suggested institutional contacts allowed her to successfully accomplish the tasks her department and faculty members have requested and one chairperson stated the staff member’s connections to her colleagues enabled him to gain perspectives from other department chairs, through the staff.

The respondents in Departments 1, 2, and 4 commented extensively regarding the staff members' institutional knowledge and information. They described staff information benefitting the departments in numerous ways. Their comments also demonstrated the staff members' centrality to their departments' functioning.

Productive power.

The category of coding identified as productive power included a broad range of descriptors based on the literature. The productive power comments (alliance power, individual discretion, job activities, position power, lines of support, and seat at the table) were the most often identified of all of the informal sources of power. The majority of respondents interviewed commented on staff productive power. The one exception to this was a faculty member (who is also a DGS) who only commented on productive power in relation to faculty members and to her DGS staff member. Staff members provided more comments on their productive power than the other role groups, and alliance power was the most commonly referred to aspect of production power. Staff members and other respondents suggested alliance power was based upon staff members close work relationship with department chairs, for the most part, and with other faculty members to some extent. Respondents cited staff members collaborating with the chair on departmental space allocations, teaching assistant allocations, budget decisions, and departmental course offerings.

Other productive power indicators (individual discretion, job activities, position power, lines of support, and seat at the table) were evident in the various activities staff

members participate in within their departments. Some of the activities cited include the faculty, student, and P&A hiring process; classroom and course scheduling; editing chair documents; managing external grant finances; budget input and oversight; renovating space; purchasing supplies and equipment; measuring and analyzing data; setting the events calendar; reimbursing faculty expenses; handling student payroll; managing departmental day-to-day activities; and being the person that faculty come to with questions and problems. In addition, several staff members attend department and leadership meetings as a resource member and one staff member is a voting member of her department's leadership team. It is clear that staff productive power is recognized by academic departments and at times faculty are shown to rely on lead staff to aid in management of the department.

Referent power.

French and Raven (1959) described one of their five sources of power as referent power, which is based upon an individual's likability or charisma. Three faculty members, from two of the four departments made comments around referent power. There were no comments by staff members or by chairs for referent power. The comments referred to current and previous staff members having positive aspects of their personality that enhance their role in the department. Descriptors used to indicate referent power related to an individual staff member's ability to get along well with everyone, being very responsible, having a good human touch, and being a good person and a caring person. This section examines how the four respondent groups discuss the

aspects of staff members' positions that relate to referent power within their departmental roles. The data does give credence to the possibility that referent power and likability is an informal power source.

Resource power.

In coding resource power, three terms emerged that were based on various researchers: resource power, reward power, and lines of supply (Mintzberg, 1983, Kanter, 1979, French & Raven, 1959). These terms indicate positive outcomes for an individual, group, or organization. Eleven of the thirteen individuals interviewed commented on their departmental staff member's resource, reward, or lines of supply power. Based on the responses, it is apparent that staff resource power varies between departments.

Respondent comments indicated staff have joint or shared responsibility for a variety of resources, including hiring teaching assistants, remodeling facilities, purchasing equipment and supplies, reviewing and approving faculty and staff expenses, advising on departmental budgets, assigning space, providing departmental fiscal oversight, and assigning graduate assistant work space. Staff members have additional input into resource allocations through collaborating with the department chair, attending department meetings and leadership councils, and, in one case, being a voting member on the department's leadership council. Respondents from all four departments commented on staff member resource power. The comments about the types of resources the staff member manages differed between departments, but demonstrated some consistency within department groups.

Power Utilization and Willingness

Administrative staff can have access to sources of power, but power without the willingness to attempt to influence the work environment is meaningless. Brass & Burkhardt (1993) described power as being dependent upon strategic action” and stated that individuals “differ in abilities, skill, and willingness to use those skills and abilities to acquire and exercise power” (p. 462)

Power can be utilized in a positive way or in a negative way. One faculty member, Dr. Thompson, provided the sole description of negative power (coercive) wielded by a former staff member. He described this former staff member as withholding information and he perceived this as subverting others within the department.

Janet Armstrong believes she has decision-making power in her department and she suggests other staff members can have that same power in their departments. She spoke extensively about her power and her willingness to use that power in a positive manner. She also described mentoring colleagues across the college to utilize the power inherent in their positions. Ms. Armstrong discussed her willingness to take on decision-making power explaining that power belongs to faculty, but they cede some of that power. She suggested that most faculty chose their careers to teach and do research and often are not interested in management tasks.

It is clear the statements by Dr. Thompson and Ms. Armstrong demonstrate the willingness of a staff member to utilize power. Informal power can be wielded positively or negatively, either supporting a department’s successes or disrupting their activities.

Implications for Theory

This qualitative research project extends the research on lower level participant power by theorists such as Mechanic and Moody. The study also expands the available research to include lower level participant power in higher education institutions, which has not previously been studied. This project also extends the research on bases of power and increases the research on informal power sources accessed and utilized by university academic department staff members.

During this interview process, the research subjects provided numerous examples of times that faculty members relied on departmental staff members for their institutional memory, knowledge and information, expertise and technical skills, and alliances and networks. These findings support previous research on resource dependency (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993) and on information network centrality (Mintzberg, 1983, Astley & Sachdeva, 1984, Brass & Burkhardt, 1993, Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Implications for Practice

The United States is currently recovering from the economic downturn of the past few years. Despite the recent upswing, there will continue to be budget concerns and constraints in higher education. State funding for higher education has declined in the past decade and postsecondary education is no longer considered a public good. With declines in state funding over the past two decades, universities rely more on tuition dollars today than they needed to 20 years ago (Weiss, 2014).

The growth of high school graduation numbers has slowed dramatically, raising concerns about future enrollments and tuition income. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) projects the total number of high school graduates to decrease by 2% from 2009-10 to 2022-23. In comparison the center reports high school graduates increased 27% from 1997-98 to 2009-10. The change in number of high school graduates is projected to vary by states and NCES projects declines of more than 5% during this same time period in 16 states and the District of Columbia (2014).

State funding increased in some states in 2012-13, but not enough to make up for cuts experienced during the years of economic decline. With these increases, some states have also increased accountability and some have made increases dependent on universities spending down their reserves or on tuition freezes (Weiss, 2014).

With state funding's decline and slow rebound, and the prospect of lowered enrollments, universities are increasingly budgeting conscious. In times of budget scarcity, allocating limited resources is important for department and individual faculty success.

In this study, the interview respondents commented on the power and authority some staff members have with department budget processes, hiring work study and assistants, allocating supplies and equipment, and scheduling classrooms and other spaces. A staff member with budgetary information or control may have increasing power and influence on departmental decision-making, as faculty members seek them out for assistance obtaining research dollars, graduate assistantships, and other funding resources.

If a skillful employee has the desire to influence others, coupled with network position or dependency powers, they can employ behavioral tactics in order to influence colleagues and supervisors. The longer an employee has been associated with the department or the university, the more they may be trusted and able to develop others' dependencies on their skills.

With the possibility that budget cuts will occur within university departments now or in the near future, it is critical to ensure that all resources are being utilized with utmost efficiency and for maximum student and faculty benefit.

Limitations of this Study

The study limitations include that this study was conducted in a single upper Midwest university with a "Doctoral/ research university-extensive" Carnegie Classification (http://chronicle.com/stats/carnegie/carnegie_results.php3). It may not be possible to use this study's results to generalize and predict behavior at other public and private higher education institutions.

A qualitative study using a small sample size may not make this study applicable to other institutions. Additional research needs to be conducted using a larger sample size.

Suggestions for Future Research

To expand the research into academic staff power, qualitative research could be conducted in more departments and institutions, utilizing larger sample sizes. In addition, a quantitative study could be designed based on the larger qualitative research project.

In the future it may be possible to extend this research from investigating staff power to investigating faculty power utilizing the current data and examining the comments made around faculty members' formal and informal power sources. Future research utilizing this data set could investigate the power inherent in the departmental chair and Director of Graduate Studies positions and examine whether that power is perceived to be inherent to the position, or whether it derives from faculty shared governance.

Any future study should include a document review to see whether designated tasks are part of the administrative staff members' position description or if the tasks are in addition to their formal duties. This review of documents would help distinguish coding for formal power (based upon position description) versus productive power (based upon job activities).

Conclusion

This study utilized qualitative measures to examine the role of informal power sources available to administrative staff in university academic departments. The research question, "In what ways do administrative staff members utilize informal power

to influence departmental decision-making?” examined informal individual power at the departmental level. Data was collected through interviews with chairs, DGS, faculty, and administrative staff at a public research university, utilizing a structured interview guide. A descriptive case study methodology was used to explore the types of informal power possessed and utilized by higher education administrative staff.

Statements made by interview respondents indicated that staff members in the four departments studied possess and utilize formal and informal power sources. This power is based upon resource dependencies, network position and formal and informal bases of power. The formal bases of power studied were formal power and legal prerogative power. The informal bases of power included coercive power, expertise and skills power, information power, productive power, referent power, and resource power. The major sources of staff informal power described by the interview participants were productive, information, and resource power. The results indicated power sources and activities can differ between departments, along with the department members’ perceptions. In some instances there appeared to be more agreement regarding the staff member’s power and activities within departments than within role groups. The aspect of productive power (the most cited source) that was the focus of responses was political alliances, both internal and external to the department.

In addition to having access to power sources, administrative staff members must also have the skills and the willingness to exercise their power. Two respondents commented on the willingness of a departmental staff member to utilize their power, one in a positive way and one negatively.

Staff informal power is not necessarily inherent in the position; it can also be ceded to them by the departmental chair, DGS and other faculty members. This can occur due to faculty time constraints or to varying interests. Whether the power is ceded to the staff member, a part of the formal job description, or obtained using an informal power source, it is apparent staff members influence departmental decisions. A partial list of the areas where responses indicated staff had a voice include course and classroom scheduling, equipment and supply purchases, space management, and fiscal oversight.

Mechanic (1962) proposed that increasing dependence on someone increases his or her power, and stated, "As an individual's years of service grow, so does their organizational access and thus their power." A university setting can be perfect example of this principle. A staff member's years of service can be lengthy, while faculty members' service as chair or DGS can be limited, by term limits or by choice. This turnover in departmental leadership can create a dependency on the staff members' institutional knowledge and their skills and expertise.

The study supports the supposition that administrative staff members have access to informal power and those with the skill and willingness to utilize that power can impact departmental decisions.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Information Sheet for Research

Higher Education: Power and Influence of Academic Administrative Staff Members

You are invited to be in a research study of Power and Influence of Academic Administrative Staff Members in higher education. You were selected as a possible participant because your department's administrative assistant has been in their current position for over ten years. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by:

Denise Thompson

Doctoral Candidate

Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Participate in an interview of 30-60 minutes with the researcher. Participants will be asked to answer questions about workplace procedures within their department.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affection those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher contacting this study is Denise Thompson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at her place of employment, Minnesota State University, Mankato, 507-389-5699, thom1903@umn.edu. The researcher's advisor is Melissa S. Anderson, 612-624-5717, mand@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix B – Interview Instrument: Questionnaire

Tell me about your role and tenure in your department:

- 1) What is your position in the department?
- 2) How many years have you been involved in your profession?
- 3) How many years have you been at the University?
- 4) How many years have you been associated with your current department?
- 5) How many years have you been in your current position?
- 6) What other positions have you held within the department, college, university?
How long did you serve in each position?
- 7) Has your current position been altered by college or university re-structuring? If so, please describe the impact these changes have had on your departmental role and duties.

Appendix C – Interview Instrument: Administrative Assistant

- 1) Tell me about how decisions are made around *use of space*
 - a) What is your role as administrative assistant?
 - b) What are the roles of the faculty members?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 2) Tell me about how decisions are made around *work study students and assistants*.
 - a) What is your role as administrative assistant?
 - b) What are the roles of the faculty members?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 3) Tell me about how decisions are made around *equipment, resources and supplies*.
 - a) What is your role as administrative assistant?
 - b) What are the roles of the faculty members?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 4) Tell me about how decisions are made around the *budgets and grant applications involved with the department's research enterprise*.
 - a) What is your role as administrative assistant?
 - b) What are the roles of the faculty members?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 5) Tell me about supervising departmental staff members.
 - a) What is your role as administrative assistant?
 - b) What are the roles of the faculty members?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 6) Tell me about additional ways that you influence departmental decisions.
- 7) Tell me about a time when you used what we might call informal power to influence decisions at the department level.

- 8) Include a list of reminders to probe for:
- a) What do you consider the proper way to handle ...?
 - b) What are the standard procedures for ...?
 - c) You mentioned _____, could you tell me more about that?

**Appendix D– Interview Instrument: Past and Present Chairs and Directors of
Graduate Studies**

- 1) Tell me about how decisions are made around *use of space*
 - a) What are the roles of the chairperson and the faculty members?
 - b) What role does the administrative assistant play in the decision?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 2) Tell me about how decisions are made around *work study students and assistants*.
 - a) What are the roles of the chairperson and the faculty members?
 - b) What role does the administrative assistant play in the decision?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 3) Tell me about how decisions are made around *equipment, resources and supplies*.
 - a) What are the roles of the chairperson and the faculty members?
 - b) What role does the administrative assistant play in the decision?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 4) Tell me about how decisions are made around the *budgets and grant applications involved with the department's research enterprise*.
 - a) What are the roles of the chairperson and the faculty members?
 - b) What role does the administrative assistant play in the decision?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 5) Tell me about supervising departmental staff members.
 - a) What is your role as chair (or DGS)?
 - b) What are the roles of the faculty members?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 6) Tell me about how departmental decisions are made:
 - a) Where do you get your facts and information to assist in decision-making?
 - b) How are decisions communicated?
- 7) Tell me about reimbursing faculty and staff expenses:

- a) Who is authorized to sign purchase orders?
 - b) Who is authorized to purchase on departmental credit cards?
 - c) Who is authorized to approve expense reimbursement forms?
 - d) Does anyone, or is anyone authorized to sign for you? If so, who?
- 8) Probes (from Lofland)
- a) What do you consider the proper way to handle ...?
 - b) What are the standard procedures for ...?
 - c) You mentioned _____, could you tell me more about that?

Appendix E – Interview Instrument: Past and Current Faculty Members

- 1) Tell me about how decisions are made around *use of space*
 - a) What are the roles of the chairperson and the faculty members?
 - b) What role does the administrative assistant play in the decision?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 2) Tell me about how decisions are made around *work study students and assistants*.
 - a) What are the roles of the chairperson and the faculty members?
 - b) What role does the administrative assistant play in the decision?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 3) Tell me about how decisions are made around *equipment, resources and supplies*.
 - a) What are the roles of the chairperson and the faculty members?
 - b) What role does the administrative assistant play in the decision?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 4) Tell me about how decisions are made around the *budgets and grant applications involved with the department's research enterprise*.
 - a) What are the roles of the chairperson and the faculty members?
 - b) What role does the administrative assistant play in the decision?
 - c) Tell me a story about how this worked recently.
- 5) Tell me about how departmental decisions are made:
 - a) Where do you get your facts and information to assist in decision-making?
 - b) How are decisions communicated?
- 6) Tell me about reimbursing faculty and staff expenses:
 - a) Who is authorized to sign purchase orders?
 - b) Who is authorized to purchase on departmental credit cards?
 - c) Who is authorized to approve expense reimbursement forms?
 - d) Does anyone, or is anyone authorized to sign for you? If so, who?
- 7) Probes (from Lofland)

- a) What do you consider the proper way to handle ...?
- b) What are the standard procedures for ...?
- c) You mentioned _____, could you tell me more about that?

Appendix F - IRB Approval Letter

Thompson, Denise R

From: irb@umn.edu
Sent: Thursday, September 16, 2010 2:19 PM
To: thom1903@umn.edu
Subject: 1006E84134 - PI Thompson - IRB - Exempt Study Notification

TO : mand@umn.edu, thom1903@umn.edu,

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

Study Number: 1006E84134

Principal Investigator: Denise Thompson

Title(s):
Higher Education: Power and Influence of Academic Administrative Staff Members

This e-mail confirmation is your official University of Minnesota RSPP notification of exemption from full committee review. You will not receive a hard copy or letter.
This secure electronic notification between password protected authentications has been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature.

The study number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office.

Research that involves observation can be approved under this category without obtaining consent.

SURVEY OR INTERVIEW RESEARCH APPROVED AS EXEMPT UNDER THIS CATEGORY IS LIMITED TO ADULT SUBJECTS.

This exemption is valid for five years from the date of this correspondence and will be filed inactive at that time. You will receive a notification prior to inactivation. If this research will extend beyond five years, you must submit a new application to the IRB before the study's expiration date.

Upon receipt of this email, you may begin your research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at (612) 626-5654.

You may go to the View Completed section of eResearch Central at <http://eresearch.umn.edu/> to view further details on your study.

The IRB wishes you success with this research.

We have created a short survey that will only take a couple of minutes to complete. The questions are basic, but will give us guidance on what areas are showing improvement and what areas we need to focus on:

<https://umsurvey.umn.edu/index.php?sid=36122&lang=um>

