

Power is the great taboo of organizations – and of relationships – yet it is probably one of the major factors in our well being in life and work. Oscar David brings a truly unique perspective as a business consultant and coach, combining these narratives with gripping personal stories to this central ingredient of human relationships.

Ian Robertson is Professor of Psychology, Trinity College, Dublin. His books include The Winner Effect: How Power Affects Your Brain and Mind Sculpture: Unleashing Your Brain's Potential.

Power is the central question of our time. Oscar David's profound book helps us to understand it deeply and mature into using it wisely. What a crucial gift for all change makers!

Walter Link is Chair of the Global Academy Foundation and Global Leadership TV.

Oscar David has come up with an extremely thorough and solid piece of work that provides insight into the many aspects and forms of power. What I find particularly appealing is his conclusion that power is a means for taking responsibility and has to be coupled to integrity in order to be able to serve a greater goal.

Herman Wijffels is Professor in Sustainability and Social Change; his former posts include chairman of the Dutch Social Economic Council (SER) and chairman of Rabobank's Board of Directors. He represented the Netherlands at the World Bank between 2006 and 2008.

Oscar David is an author whose mind shows a charitable keenness and receptiveness. What makes his book special is the uninhibited way in which he has entered the domain of the subject of power. This often makes his observations new and the combinations he makes surprising. Even for a political scientist like me. I have learned much from him.

Harry Starren is Dean of de Nederlandse School and former CEO of managementcenter de Baak. He is a speaker, a writer, a facilitator and the author of such books as Think like a manager, but don't act like one.

Oscar David has found a really useful way of thinking differently about power. Not as something to be done away with or which is inherently bad, but rather as a phenomenon that takes shape according to the circumstances.

Joris Luyendijk is author of the bestsellers People like Us: Misrepresenting the Middle East and Swimming with Sharks: My Journey into the World of the Bankers.

In this book Oscar David has an extremely personal way of showing us how power plays a role everywhere in both his life and in ours. He provides a conceptual portrait of power and clearly demonstrates how power actually works and in how many ways it becomes manifest. He points out how we prefer to avoid mentioning the phenomenon of power by name. And how this causes us to think too infrequently about power and how we exercise it. This book is an excellent aid to starting this discussion with ourselves and with others.

Wessel Ganzevoort is a boardroom consultant and emeritus professor of management and organisation and former chairman of the board of KPMG Consulting Europe. He is the author of Spirituality in Leadership.

This book is a colourful kaleidoscope of power, with personal anecdotes – sometimes moving, sometimes hilarious and sometimes shocking – from Oscar David’s rich experience. It prompts us to think about our own behaviour in relation to power, which is a good thing because everyone has power (at one time or another).

Twan van de Kerkhof is the founder and director of the European Leadership Platform (ELP), former editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine Management Scope and author of, among others The YOU of Leadership.

How can we learn to deal wisely with power – our own power and other people’s? In this book, Oscar David embarks on a very personal, profound and carefully planned search through the phenomenology of power.

Cristof Bosch is a member of the Board of Directors of Robert Bosch GmbH.

During my political studies I learned that power is the ability to exercise influence, an important quality that leaders must have, but one that can lean towards a darker side. Power sometimes deteriorates into abuse of power and history has taught us what fatal consequences this can have for individuals, groups, organisations and society. Oscar David has an authentic, open-hearted and extremely readable way of unravelling the concept of power for his readers. A must-read for every leader, consultant and (team) coach!

Yvonne Burger is a management consultant, executive coach and professor at the VU University, Amsterdam, where she is programme director of the postgraduate programme in Executive Coaching and Executive Team-Coaching. She is the author of, among others, Spiegel aan de top [Reflecting on top management].

Increasing our understanding of power is important; it touches everyone, either actively or passively. Oscar David offers us a unique glimpse into the soul of power. Take advantage of it by reading this wonderfully written and meaningful book.

Boris Dittrich is the Advocacy Director of Sexual Minorities of the human rights organisation, Human Rights Watch, former chairman of D66 (a Dutch progressive liberal political party) and author of, among others, W.O.L.F.

Oscar David really brings the concept to life by using gripping examples and thoroughly dissecting the mechanism of power and by making it clear that the real challenge is to exercise power with integrity. Not only for leaders, but for everyone, each at his own level, because everyone encounters power. This is a moving book.

Katja Staartjes was the first Dutch woman to climb Mount Everest. She is interim manager, coach and public speaker, and author of, among others, Peak Performance and Lopen over de grens [Walking across borders].

A thorough and instructive study of the machinations and mechanisms behind relationships involving power.

De Correspondent

With this book Oscar David provides insight into both power as a phenomenon in the world around us and how all this fits in with our own deep patterns and experiences. This is the only way that we will learn to deal more effectively with those oh so important questions about (lack of) power of others ... and of ourselves.

Erik van de Loo is a Professor of Leadership at INSEAD Business School and at the TIAS School for Business and Society.

Oscar David has succeeded in writing a book about power that is fun and a good read. It offers a panoramic perspective on power.

BNR Radio

We all want to achieve power. Oscar David has written a fascinating book on the topic.

Het Financieele Dagblad

OSCAR DAVID

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OF POWER**

Developing true leadership

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Anonymous case histories were occasionally compiled from aspects of various situations that actually took place. In such cases persons and organisations are described in such a way that they are unrecognisable.

For the sake of legibility, the masculine third person singular form (he/him/his) is used, though the female alternative would have been equally appropriate.

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Foreword

The fact that power and instinct are interlinked goes without saying. Mankind has an animal instinct that wants to protect, prevail and dominate. The combination of power and integrity seems less self-evident. Everyone has come across situations in which power was taken, maintained or increased in ways that were totally void of integrity. At the same time, precisely because our leaders are in positions of power, we want them to be the epitome of integrity. The most effective formula for handling power with integrity lies within the human heart and our capacity to be ourselves. If we are able to act according to our deepest values when we make choices that affect the future of others, we are demonstrating our ability to exercise power with integrity. When power is exercised with integrity, we feel imbued with a sense of strength, dignity and inspiration. This is apparent not only to those who experience the consequences of the power being exercised. The leader himself also becomes stronger, more dignified and inspiring.

In this book I want to take you, the reader, on a journey through the world of power. We shall visit places where it will become clear why it is so difficult to make the connection with integrity and to act accordingly. Many obstacles litter the route, and the distortions are countless.

Each of us has to find the right balance between instinct and ethics. If we think about a person in a position of power, we are more likely to think of a tyrant than of a do-gooder. This is not so surprising. Anyone exposed to the temptations of power knows just how difficult it is to keep a tight rein on our instinct-driven impulses. But a person who tames his instincts too zealously will never find the strength to exercise power in all its glory.

We must succeed in finding a formula that permits our instincts to play a constructive role while simultaneously allowing us to be guided by all the wisdom that we ourselves advocate. This is the task for everyone who finds himself in the arena of power. For an onlooker it is easy to talk. The adages that apply to money, love and creativity also apply to power: those without it run no risk of

losing it, but nor can they use it to create a thing of beauty. Those of us who do not have power cannot abuse it, but nor can we make a difference.

Fortunately there are always people who are prepared to take on the responsibility of accepting positions of power in places where it is desperately needed. Whether they are captains of industry, volunteers working in neighbourhood associations, health care executives, civil servants of government ministries, spiritual leaders of religious communities, national politicians, partners in law firms or commissioners of police: how a person exercises his power can make a world of difference. It is also important for people who are not at the centre of power to nevertheless understand power. Because it is our birth right to exercise power over our own life and because all our interactions with other people involve relationships of power.

In the nineteen-seventies the illustrator Peter de Smet created a series of comics entitled *The General*. The comic's main character was a general who kept trying to expel the marshal from his fort. He never succeeded, however, despite many desperate attempts. Ultimately, power cannot be grasped, but is given to us to enable us to become the person we were meant to be and serve others.

The purpose of this book is to increase our understanding of the dynamics of power. Power can only be exercised with integrity when we have a clear notion of all aspects involved in power.

Stories about power

During the past 25 years I studied power both directly and indirectly. I held training courses for leaders, directors and executives and advised their organisations during moments of change. I guided boards and management teams through good times and bad, and coached leaders who were in search of insight and inspiration. During those years I came across hundreds of stories about power.

Power can be discussed in a variety of ways. In this book I present various different theories and models that have been developed over the years. These are supported by examples taken from my own practice. The book also contains a lot of personal experience stories. The power of personal stories is the appealing way they

teach us important lessons that we tend to remember either for their beauty or because of the impression they make on us. Some of the stories included are short while others are long. Certain stories are exceptionally personal, while others are more business-related. Many stories come from boardrooms or from workshops and coaching discussions. Others were distilled from the many discussions and interviews I had with leaders and consultants within the context of this book. These are mainly clients and colleagues who relied on me to assist them or others who actually inspired me.

Duin & Kruidberg

There we sat, in the large meeting room at Duin & Kruidberg Country Estate in Santpoort, ABN AMRO's exclusive conference centre at the time. The executive board met there regularly, and other departments of the bank were also allowed to use it. It was unquestionably one of the most impressive environments in which I have ever given a workshop. At the time to which I am referring we were holding a second conference with one of the management teams. During the first session we focussed mainly on the Enneagram, a personality typology that improves people's understanding of themselves and others.

Now it was time for a different way of getting to know one another better, so each participant told his or her life story; all very personal, which is why it generally made an enormous impression. It improves the understanding that members of management teams have of one another. 'Will you tell us your story now?' the leader of the management team asked me. I sensed feeling a degree of reticence, which the leader did not fail to notice. 'I think it would be inspiring, and we want to get to know you better too,' she persisted.

This was contrary to everything I had learnt as a psychologist and management consultant. I had been strongly influenced by the psychoanalytical approach. In such situations the leader is seen as a sort of projection screen, onto which all sorts of transferences can take place. The idea is to allow your client to make this transference, which means limiting your own input. Furthermore, I am aware that narcissism is frequently found not only in leaders, but also in the professional group to which I belong. I prefer

to perpetuate my image as a modest consultant. Simultaneously, I realised right there and then that this was a chance to reveal more about myself. I felt safe and welcome, so I decided to share my life story with the team.

It proved to be a good lesson. Apparently my openness encouraged others to become more open and sharing towards one another. Physics has taught us that a researcher always influences his field of research, no matter how much distance he maintains. It became clear to me that, if my influence was unavoidable anyway, I would find a personal way in which to realise the objective of the meeting.

It is the same intention that prompted me to write this book. This is why I give examples of situations that made an impression on me during my life, or that were meaningful in relation to what I have learnt about power.

Thank you!

I want to thank everyone who contributed to this book. My encounters with clients resulted in a lot of knowledge and insight. It is thanks to those encounters that I was able to learn and grow.

I thank my parents who responded so positively to everything I wanted to learn about life. I thank all my teachers, trainers and therapists who taught me that self-knowledge is the key to a better understanding of the world. Special thanks go to Hameed Ali, Bob Ball, Jeanne Hay and many more of their colleagues.

Thanks to everyone who encouraged me to shape my own work while also teaching me so much about the profession. Thanks to John Adams, Erik van Praag and Cees Swarttouw.

Thanks to the executives, consultants and others who were willing to speak so openly and personally about their insights into – and relationship with – power. Their statements are what brought the theory to life. My thanks in this respect go to Jane Armytage, Wayne Armytage, Erna Baars, Adjiedj Bakas, Jacques Bakker, Marc Chatrand, Yolanda Denis, Boris Dittrich, Wessel Ganzevoort, Armand Girbes, Leo de Haan, Peter Heij, Evert Karman, Twan van de Kerkhof, Susan King, Elke Lorenz, Ad van Luyn, Ruby May, Ian McNay, Margreeth van der Meijde, Ernst Nijkerk, Chris Polman, Seppe Raaphorst, Xandra van Rhee, Marko Rinck,

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Thanks to all my colleagues for their tangible support and encouragement during the writing process. Thanks to my Diamond Approach Intervision Group: Guus Brackel, Wessel Ganzevoort and Marko Rinck. Thanks to my intercoach trainers – the intervision group: Yvonne Burger, Yoep Choy, Marian Hijmans and Gérard Vreeman. Thanks to all those directly and indirectly involved in this book: Amie de Jeu, Coen van der Kroon, Chris Ribbius, Angelique Schueler and Katja Staartjes. Thanks to Evert Karman, Twan van de Kerkhof, Marko Rinck, Harry Starren and everyone else for reading while I wrote and providing me with valuable feedback. Thanks to Marian Res for the many years of her untiring assistance. Thanks to Linda Nederlof for her enormous involvement and support. Thanks to my publisher, Wardy Poelstra, who was confident about making a book with me and thanks to Christene Beddow for translating the book so well. And, last but not least, thanks to Daan van Kampenhout, the unseen driving force behind this book.

Oscar David

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1 | *The world of power*

Power is a mysterious phenomenon. Many people want as little to do with it as possible, or may even fear it. When others have power over you, you may become the victim of power. But if you exercise power, there is the risk that you will abuse it. Neither of these are attractive perspectives. Nevertheless, many people desire power and have countless reasons for wanting to obtain it.

Characteristics of power

Power has neither colour nor odour. Although it comes in many shapes and sizes, it cannot be touched. Yet at the same time, the power factor always plays a role in human relationships, whether we are aware of it or not.

Power is the capacity to determine. Power makes it possible to determine who will play and who will stay on the reserve bench, who will get promoted and who will be dismissed. A person with power can pass through any door, while he himself can keep the door tightly closed. Powerful people are able to determine the course, and thus influence the lives of others.

Nevertheless, tracing the source of power is not always easy. For instance, the organisation structure of companies and institutions determines a good deal, but not everything. In addition to similarities in how power works within different organisations – from a village school to a multinational and from a government ministry to a hospital – there are also large differences. For instance, leaders in one organisation seem to have more power than holders of the same positions elsewhere. Some people who are said to have power feel this is not the case.

Companies and institutions that exercise power with integrity become safer, more effective, more innovative and more transparent. This is when power serves not only the organisation, but also its employees, its clients and society. Power that is used solely for personal gain has become corrupt. We all encounter corrupt power

to a greater and lesser degree. For instance, during a reorganisation we feel that our own department should remain untouched and, naturally, we can find good arguments for this. However, had we worked in a different department, then that department is the one that, in our opinion, should remain untouched. In other words: the interests of the organisation are frequently at odds with our personal interests. The fact is that a person who does not serve his own interests is hardly likely to achieve – let alone retain – a top position.

This is one of the characteristics of power, and simultaneously one of its dilemmas: failing to serve your own interests results in loss of power. Steering from a position of powerlessness is impossible and results will not be achieved. And wherever power is up for grabs, a power struggle is inevitable. People in top positions in organisations spend a lot of their time maintaining or increasing their power. Those who do not soon find themselves out in the cold. As organisations become larger and more powerful, power tends to be concentrated at the top, and the power struggle is generally fiercer.

Power is a controversial topic. In most European languages, the word is easily given a negative connotation and associated with abuse of power. A person is not likely to say about himself: ‘I am an executive in a large organisation, which means that I have a lot of power.’ We are more likely to hear something like: ‘I am an executive in a large organisation and together with my colleague executives and staff I work on good solutions for challenges that the future has in store for us.’

This negative connotation is not entirely coincidental. Europe suffered greatly due to extreme forms of abuse of power, not only in the twentieth century, but also further back in the past. This experience has left deep scars in our collective psyche. Furthermore, the Dutch culture can be characterised as egalitarian. A good example of this is our polder model. We do not appreciate excessively large differences between people or excessive displays of power; it is wise for a person who finds himself in a position of power to exercise it cautiously.

Historical author Geert Mak provides a good historical explanation for this. In his book *My Father's Century*, he explained how the situation of Holland's densely populated lowlands with the constant threat of floods demanded consensus and cooperation

in order to remain in control of the water. Water boards, in which all cross-sections of the population work together, are among Europe's oldest democratic structures that still function today.

This does not necessarily mean there is less power at the top in the Netherlands, but it is less visible to the naked eye and spread over a small group of rulers: an oligarchy.

Power and power struggles

Power and power struggles are inextricably linked to one another. A power struggle can sharpen up standpoints and clarify the direction. We see this for example during elections: all the parties want to get their message across comprehensibly and succinctly.

But a power struggle can also result in a war zone that costs a good deal of energy with little or no benefits. Or, as one of my clients (a top Shell executive) once said to me about a power struggle in which he was involved: 'The fact that I shall survive this is because of my ability to recover at night. I start each day, in the bathroom, at six o'clock in the morning. By then my grey matter is already working at full capacity. And it continues to do so until about midnight, when I am lying in my bed. Colleagues who are not fit at the start of the next day simply won't survive here.'

Individuals, teams, organisations, national states and the world as a whole are continually in the throes of a power struggle. Why is it that our advanced society has managed to solve the most complicated technical problems, and can carry out amazing surgery in the world of medicine, but is unable to solve problems relating to power?

Power and corruption

As I said before: the word power is emotionally charged. We prefer to speak of influence, authority and leadership. When we think of power it often conjures up associations involving abuse. In recent years we have been confronted with money-grabbing bank directors, financial directors and accountants who manipulate statistics, sexual liberties taken by presidents and church leaders, just to name a few. In Europe we soon start recalling the Second World

War and the regimes that brought it about, as well as the crimes committed by communist and other fascist regimes.

A lot has been written, and justifiably, about the manifestations and forms of abuse of power. If we want to develop the constructive potential of power, it is important to remain aware of its dark side and to obtain insight into motives that can lead to abuse of power.

One of the causes of abuse of power is inherent in our nature. Fighting for what we want is so inherent to how our minds work, that it is almost impossible for us to act differently. It is part of our nature to form hierarchic structures in which one leader eventually comes out on top – irrespective of whether he is called a director, a chairman, a president, a king, a boss or the pope.

At the same time mankind, unlike animals, does have an enormous capacity for self-reflection. This allows us to develop awareness and to learn. This can result in our gaining insight that can help us to see, for example, that results can also be achieved without a power struggle and with less effort.

When the exercise of power is coupled with integrity, those who are in power can instigate positive developments while creating order. The fact that people are capable of this is more than just fantastic, it is actually necessary if we are to realise progress and change. The more leaders we have who have developed integrity-based power, the better able they will be to serve the organisations they govern.

Ideally, power and integrity are inextricably linked to one another. Without integrity, exercising power is like playing with fire. You could opt to avoid the fire, but then you will not be in a position to exercise power. This is why it is important to learn about integrity, so that we allow the instinctive aspects of power to shape our lives, but take conscious charge of the helm.

Power and leadership

Power enables people to create order and get things done. It is a way of giving direction to the daily existence of oneself and others. Throughout the ages there have been leaders who abused their power. This will remain so in the future. This is because the forces summoned by power are too strong. You do not need to be a psy-

chologist to know that power can be addictive. In addition to allowing us to serve others, power is also a means for fulfilling our own requirements at the expense of others.

Fortunately, virtuous leaders have also always been with us throughout the ages. These are leaders who know how to use their power wisely. Many examples in classical literature refer to the integrity of those in power. So it is not the case that we have only had tools to make us better leaders since the development of modern psychology and the availability of manuals on leadership theories.

All cultures and all times have brought forth leaders capable of exercising power with integrity. Our own age too has its wise leaders who are an example to those around them. Many of these we will not know because they do not appear on the television, nor in the newspapers and they are not among our Facebook friends or LinkedIn connections. But perhaps we can think of names from our own immediate environment. Names of the local school headmaster, the health care team leader or the bank's local branch director. Not every leader holds a top position, nor does he find himself in the spotlight on a daily basis.

I often ask leaders what power means to them. Frequently this turns out to be the first time they have discussed the topic. This is not so surprising. Power is rarely on the agenda as a study topic in academic circles, nor in management training courses and business school programmes, and there is even less chance of the subject being linked to a person's actual functioning.

The topic is also rarely discussed in executives' boardrooms. If it is mentioned at all, then this is generally only when there are problems or tension that demand a solution or a strategy. Discussing the mutual balance of power is often taboo, though discussing inter-staff relations and staff-management relations is easier.

As early as in 600 B.C., Chinese philosopher Lao Tse said: 'In order to retain power, one must refrain from demonstrating it.' In fact, the same applies to talking about power. Mauk Mulder, one of the most prominent Dutch thinkers on the topic of power, discovered a number of mechanisms relating to exercising power. One of these is that members of a group who have power prefer to increase rather than decrease their distance from those who have less power. For them, an open discussion of power implies the unpleasant possibility that this distance will be reduced. After all, those with less power generally try to reduce power, and if the

distance is great, this could lead to a discussion of the power-distance or reducing it in other ways. In other words: in order to retain power, it is better for those who have it to remain silent, and make sure that the subject of power does not get onto the agenda.

Let sleeping dogs lie

When I was still a young consultant, my enormous interest in power was not always to my advantage. At the time I was not yet convinced that the mechanisms that govern power, as described by Mauk Mulder, really did apply at all times and in all places. Irrespective of the situation, I wanted to get respective power relationships out onto the table in organisations as soon as possible. Will I ever forget that this contributed to me missing out on assignment (and possibly more)?

It was in November 1997. I received a phone call from one of my clients, a director of a government ministry. He asked me whether I would come to visit his boss, the Director General (DG), to talk about the possibilities of advising the DG and his team. Quite apart from the fact that I am quick to ask for permission to speak informally, I learnt later – after my rejection – that people find me too direct in conversations. The next day, my client, the director, commented on how quickly I started talking about his boss's leadership position and relationships within the team, and this was despite the fact that I was not alone with the DG, as he – one of the DG's directors – was also present. A more veiled approach would undoubtedly have won confidence more easily.

These and other experiences taught me that it takes time before you can broach sensitive topics.

2 | *In search of power*

Sooner or later in life we are all confronted with the world of power. As children we might have noticed that sometimes mother was the boss and at other times it was father. At school, one child may have tended to rule the roost more than another. Later, when we start working, we cannot escape the dynamics of the power relationships we encounter there. Some people prefer to avoid the world of power, while others feel attracted to it.

Bob takes charge

We don't really understand why things happened the way they did. But during our time at primary school, whenever Ewout and I had a great idea, it would get carried out. Sometimes we would decide it was time to build huts in the woods. So off we set, taking kids from our class whom we thought were most suited to the job, and the huts got built. And if we decided it was time to get out our marbles, we would make a fantastic marble run, and within a few days the rest of the class would follow as a matter of course. We were creative, enterprising and invincible. Until one day, all of a sudden, everything changed.

It was one of the first days of the new school year. We were in our fifth year of primary school, so we were about 9 or 10 years old. There was a new boy in the class. His name was Bob. He seemed nice enough. In the break he asked me if I wanted to fight him. I thought it was a great idea. I may have been one of the smallest boys in the class, but with a few years of judo behind me, I was also the strongest and I loved to fight. I particularly wanted to fight Bob, because then he would know how matters stood.

I had never lost yet to a classmate. This time, however, the tables were turned. I didn't stand a chance against him. In next to no time I was down on the ground and no matter what I did, Bob managed to keep me down.

That day brought to an end the creative empire that Frank and