UNIT 4 CONFORMITY AND OBEDIENCE

Objectives

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand and explain the meaning of conformity and obedience
- appreciate the nature of Compliance, Identification and Internalization
- understand the experimental designs and significance of Milgram's studies
- appreciate the dynamics of influences on individual's response to group conformity.

Structure

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4.2 Conformity
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4.1 INTRODUCTION

Human society from the inception of its civilization has confronted several dualities. One particular duality which confronts us even today is between freedom and conformity, empowerment and obedience. At different points of human civilization it was believed that conformity and obedience are the best forms of social governance. It was also believed that freedom and empowerment gives rise to chaos and destabilization of social order. Although such thought basically reflects pre-industrial mind set, it is not uncommon even today to come across people in the work organizations whose most important "wish-list" happens to be conformity and obedience from their subordinates.

There is definite reason for which people expect conformity and obedience from others. To some extent the reason can be traced in the meaning of these words. Conformity is defined as the act of compliance, acquiescing or yielding to a tendency to yield readily to others especially in a weak and subservient way. Obedience is defined as the state or quality of being obedient or the act or practice of obeying dutifully, in otherwise submissive compliance. An example of conformity and obedience can best be derived from any regimented structure - a totalitarian state and Military service can be considered as fairly god examples. It is also fairly known that, in these types of social structures problems are plenty. These social structures have to deploy enormous amount of resources to impose control and suppress the human beings eternal desire for freedom.

4.2 CONFORMITY

'Conformity can be defined as a change in a person's behaviour or opinions as a result of real or imagined pressures from a person or group of people.'

(Aronson 1976, 17)
Conformity and Obedience

The action of a subject when he goes along with his peers, people of his own status, who have no special right to direct his behaviour.

(Milgram 1974: 113)

A conformist might be defined as a person who has managed to avoid being defined as a deviant.

(Schur 1979: 18)

Response to conformity pressures varies according to many different factors. While the most intelligent group members are less likely to conform, authoritarian personalities are more likely to do so: Where the membership of a group maintains both sexes, conformity levels are higher than in single-sex groups. Other variables that relate to increasing conformity are the size of majority in favour, the ambiguity of the situation, agreement among most other members and the open and decentralized nature of the group's communication systems (Shaw 1974).

If a member sees that most of the other members are more competent than he or she is, then he or she is much more likely to conform to the pressures that the group exerts. Conformity is related to security and acceptance, the sense of not being alone in having to face the problems of life, and it induces order into the group situation with the enhanced probability of integrating and coordinating individual behaviour.

Aronson (1976) suggests that in unfamiliar situations we tend to conform to the behaviour of others whom we suspect 'know the ropes'. Aronson asserts that behaviour we learn in this way tends to be enduring because it is an exercise in determining reality, an attempt to make sense of a part of our world that, being unfamiliar, lacks security.

Fear lies at the base of conformity, the fear of not being accepted. The greater the respect an individual has for the others of his group members, the more need there is to be accepted, and the greater is the pressure that the group can exert to produce a public conformity to its norms, rules, and standards. But public conformity is not necessarily private acceptance and it is this (a continuing conformity even when the pressure to conform is removed) that is the element of change.

Festinger's (1957) concept of cognitive dissonance helps to explain something of conformity pressure. The tension created by holding conflicting cognitions has to be resolved by first changing one element of the behaviour; second, finding examples that reduce its dissonant effect; or third, creating cognitions that indicate that the dissonant behaviour is in fact good and beneficial. The reduction of an individual's dissatisfaction in a social situation is achieved by producing behaviour acceptable to the others or by redefining needs relative to the situation.

If there are alternative sources of need satisfaction available, for example, other groups, then, if there are no restrictions on movement, when the pressure to conform becomes too great it will tend to reduce an individual's level of satisfaction for his or her group below the point where these at alternative sources become more attractive. When this happens, individual will move, for even the dissatisfactions and consequences of moving can be overcome if the pressure is great enough. This is a serious consideration for groups where members cannot move and where pressure generating high levels of dissatisfaction exists. Psychological withdrawal may be one method of coping but others, much more disruptive and designed to change the situation, are equally likely.

Allen (1965) suggested that apart from the problem of private and public acceptance there are ten situational factors that influence an individual's response to group conformity pressures:

1. The level of commitment to the group
2. The level of attractiveness of the group
3. Status in the group
4. The degree of interdependence within the group
5. The group's composition
6. The group's size and unanimity
7. The extent to which the nature of the group norms are extreme
8. Whether the group is task competent
9. What level of task
10. How difficult and important the task is.

Activity 1

Interview ten people around you whom you know, ask them whether they have been influenced by someone/groups or they have influenced others/groups. How many times it was successful

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Allen ended his essay on situational factors in conformity thus: `Neither should we fail to realize that other modes of response to group pressure are available to a person in addition to conformity or nonconformity' (Allen :1965: 142). Conformity is dependent behaviour. It requires that those it affects should be of equal status. It spreads by imitation. The requirement to conform is implicit and the conformist believes that his or her autonomy has been retained. Tactical conformity may be an ingratiating’ act but in general conformity means 'bringing one's behaviour within bounds defined as acceptable by group members and doing one's best to meet their expectations' (Sherif 1976:100). It is a democratic process in that it attempts to create sameness.

4.3 COMPLIANCE

'This term best describes the mode of behaviour of a person who is motivated by a desire to gain reward or avoid punishment. Typically his behaviour is only as long-lived as is the promise of the reward or the threat of punishment.'

(Aronson 1976: 29)

'He that complies against his will [I]so of his own opinions still.'

(Butler :1663: '33)

Compliance is another possible response to the influence a group can exert. A consideration of compliance brings into focus the problems of public and private behavior. On the face of it, compliance appears to be conformity. The compliant person apparently accepts the norms, standards, and values of the system he or she is currently inhabiting. His or her reasons for this behaviour are obvious. Like an animal that blends with its background, the compliant person becomes unnoticed and acceptable. In a word, he or she has ensured personal security, freedom to move about and an avoidance of being highlighted as being different.

The newcomer to an established group' encounters problems precisely of this nature. If there is a strong need to belong and to be accepted, then there will be compliance with the demands made by the group without any realization of the real reasons for these demands. When the individual feels secure, he or she may not only be able to question or even resist some of the demands, but also be able to assess the consequences of such noncompliance upon his or her satisfaction. Compliance equates obedience and appears to arise as an attempt on the part of an individual to attract reward and avoid punishment. The behavior tends to last only as long as the promise of reward or threat is sustained as behavior can change when the situation changes. However, there is some indication that compliance with small demands facilitates
compliance with larger requests, probably because the complying person has already become involved and also because his or her attitudes may have been significantly changed by the first act of compliance.

The basic factor in compliance is the compliant person's perception of the ability of the influencer to give rewards or punishments. This equates with the first of five social powers delineated by French and Raven (1959). If the power referent is constantly in attendance then compliant behaviour assumes a greater durability. Similarly, if the compliant person's satisfactions are increased by the act of either in the actions themselves or the consequences of those actions then the compliant state will tend to endure.

Generally speaking, the compliant person holds complying opinions and values lightly and does not believe in them. He or she is demonstrating a public compliance. Milgram (1974) believed that the reward received by the compliant person may be a profound emotional gratification and suggested that compliant behaviour took place in a hierarchical structure; it was not imitative, its prescriptions were explicit, and compliant people tended to resign their autonomy.

Compliance perpetuates inequality and is concerned with the maintenance of differentials. But from the point of view of the compliant person it is one way of dealing with social influence; it provides security and a breathing space without undue commitment.

### 4.4 IDENTIFICATION

Identification is another response to group pressure. To identify indicates a desire to be like the influencer and is concerned with attractiveness. Satisfaction in this case resides in taking on the values, opinions, and beliefs of the influencer, and creating a self-denying relationship. Negative identification is possible in which dislike engenders rejection of all that the disliked influencer stands for.

Identification appears to be a very powerful agent in advertising and selling because people whom the advertising audience like, and can identify with, can influence opinion about products as long as these are not too important. Similarly, prejudices can be picked up by identification with people who hold them.

The continuous pressure necessary in compliance is not essential in identification, which is associated with, and conterminous with, the perception of the source of influence. This can be seen as three important variables:

1. The influencer needs to remain important.
2. The influencer needs to continue to hold the same beliefs.
3. The identifier's beliefs are not challenged by opinions that turn out to be logically more convincing.

The latter shows that identification contains as part of the satisfaction to the identifier a large element of the desire to be right.

### 4.5 INTERNALIZATION

Conformity, compliance, and identification are relatively transient responses to group pressure, internalization is not. As with identification, there is a strong element of the desire to be right in its formation. The satisfaction that internalization gives is thus intense and this allows the influence to become independent of the source and an integral part of the internalizer.

If the influencing agent, group, or person is perceived as trustworthy and as possessing good judgement, then the values and beliefs of that agent will become an integral part of the internalizer's value system. The will become his or her values and will be very difficult to
change. As the desire to be right (that is, not to appear to be stupid; ignorant, or foolish) is a very powerful and self-sustaining motivation, the continued presence of the influencing agent is not necessary and may even be forgotten after a period of time.

Because of these factors the internalizer has more flexible responses than is allowed by any of the other responses because the system he or she is operating from is his or her private system based on credibility.

### 4.6 REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP GROUPS

‘In social psychological theory, it has long been recognized that an individual's membership groups have an important influence on the values and attitudes he holds. More recently, attention has also been given to the influence of his reference groups: the groups in which he aspires to attain or maintain membership.’

(Siegel and Siegel 1957: 300)

Reference groups have been called 'invisible committees' and appear to act as a standard against which an individual measures his or her performance. Even the knowledge that he or she may never actually come face to face with one of his or her reference groups - indeed, it may no longer be in existence like the childhood family - does not appear to lessen the influence its norms can have on behaviour. A degree of internalization of the standards and values of the reference group has taken place so that these values become integrated in the individual and need no continuing support from the source. It is this particular influence on an individual's action that is so hard to appreciate.

Carolyn Sherif (1976) calls reference groups and persons 'the social connections of self and illustrates the point by showing how the many groups of which she is, and has been, a member are her 'social anchors', the links that tie her to the society in which in large measure give meaning to her life. In any one social situation most of these 'social anchors' are not visible, but they can have quite a great effect on the behaviour of the anchored individual. How can an observer interpret behaviour that is not wholly related to the current observable scene but partly to a hidden and powerful pre-programming?

The greater the individual's respect for his or her reference group, the more he or she will have internalized their norms. These will become the standards to live by, guides to relationships, and will establish attitudes and condition responses to major life events. Not all of the individual's reference groups will fit happily together and there may well be conflicting messages.

Some reference groups and persons may not be human or real in the sense that they can be fictional, historical, or imaginary. What is important is that they represent and produce standards that can be integrated into an individual's value scheme. It is possible to stretch the concept to include ideas, abstract principles, and ideals as forming standards in the same way. As Sprott (1958:60) has said, 'We are to a large measure the artifacts of our affiliations'.

Two other responses need to be given brief consideration. These are co-operation and competition.

### 4.7 CO-OPERATION

Because co-operative behaviour (that is, going along with others) has great survival value, it is a response to group pressure that is well understood by most people. It is dependent on the perception that in order to achieve a given goal individuals need one another. If the goal is important (i.e. superordinate), then individuals will be willing to sacrifice other important personal issues in order co-operate with others in its attainment'. While, co-operative
endeavour is in progress, a state of mutual inter dependence occurs and there is a tendency to reduce hostility and prejudice and to increase friendliness and attentiveness to others.

### 4.8 COMPETITION

Competition is formed strongly on the need to achieve and seems to be an essential element of Western society. Aggressive behaviour, the need to dominate, to succeed and to do well are all aspects of competition between individuals and groups. Prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping are all strengthened in the presence of competition.

On the other hand work organizations expect some amount of conformity and obedience from its members. Work organizations by nature do not expect its members to behave like mature adults. Commitment and involvement are the two most civilized expressions; which are widely valued in the organizations. There are enough theoretical and empirical validity to prove that nature of commitment and involvement of the organizational members depend upon the nature of power used at micro and macro levels in the organization. When coercive power is used it gives rise to alienation, remunerative power gives rise to calculative involvement and only normative power gives rise to moral commitment on the part of the organizational members.

### 4.9 MILGRAM'S STUDY

It is some 30 years since the social psychologist Stanley Milgram began his study on the dynamics of obedience to authority. Some salient features of the studies can be summarized as follows.

1. The enormity of the basic findings - that 64 per cent of a sample average American adult men were willing to punish another person with increasingly higher voltages of electric shock when ordered to do so by an experimenter who possessed no coercive power to enforce his orders.

2. The studies represent one of the largest integrated research programs ever conducted in social psychology (Milgram conducted over 20 variations of his experimental design and used over 1000 subjects.

3. Milgram's studies have fundamental and far-reaching implications for our understanding of human behavior and, more particularly, the extent to which a person's behavior is determined by particular situational and organizational factors.

**The basic experimental design of Milgram's studies**

A typical male subject volunteering to take part in Milgram's early experiments at Yale University in 1963 is greeted by a stern-looking experimenter in a white coat. He finds that another subject has already arrived. The experimenter informs the two men that they are to take part in an experiment to discover the effect of punishment on learning and verbal memory. One subject will be the 'teacher' and the other the 'learner' during the session. The allocation of the respective roles is decided by lottery.

The two men are told that the teacher is to read pairs of words to the learner and then test the learner's memory by giving the first word of each pair and asking him to supply the second word. Incorrect answers are punished by an electric shock administered by the teacher by depressing one of 30 switches located on a 'shock generator' in front of him. These switches are arranged in a row and are labeled according to the voltage they transmit to an electrode strapped to the learner's arm. The first switch is labeled 15 volts, the second 30 volts, the third 45 volts and so on. The final switch is labeled 450 volts. There are also a number of descriptive labels on the switch panel. For example, 'Slight Shock' describes the 15-16 volt range and the 435 to 450 volt range is labeled 'XXX'.
The experimenter tells the teacher that he is to punish the learner's first recall error with an electric shock of 15 volts. The second error is to be punished by a shock of 30 volts, and so on until the learner has correctly memorized the list of word pairs.

Before the session begins, the learner is strapped to a chair, his arm is treated with an electrically conductive paste to which an electrode is then attached. He mentions to the experimenter that learner has mild heart condition. Her is assured that the shocks, although painful, will not result in any permanent tissue damage.

Then the teacher is escorted to an adjacent room where the shock generator is situated. The experiment begins. The experimenter sits a few yards behind the teacher to remind him that every error must be punished by increasingly severe electric shocks.

During a typical session the learner makes an error in approximately three out of four responses and the teacher steadily increases the shock level. At 75 volts the teacher hears the learner moan 'ugh'. At 150 volts the learner calls out 'Ugh Experimenter, get me out of here. I told you I had heart trouble. My heart's starting to bother me now. Get me out of here, please. My heart's starting to bother me. I refuse to go on. Let me out''

The experimenter ignores these pleas and urges the teacher to continue. At 210 volts, the learner demands to be let out. Still the experimenter urges the teacher to continue until all the word pairs are learned. At 300 volts prolonged agonized screaming can be heard and the learner shouts in desperation that he will no longer provide answers. The experimenter tells the teacher that silence represents an error and must be punished.

In the first two experiments 64 per cent of teachers administered the maximum shock of 450 volts.

In fact the learner was an accomplice trained to play the role and no electric shocks were administered. However, the actual subjects - the teachers - were completely unaware of this. As Milgram states:

There is overwhelming evidence that the great majority of subjects, both obedient and defiant, accepted the victims' reactions as genuine. The evidence takes the form of: (a) tension created in the subjects; (b) scores on 'estimated' pain (c) subjects' accounts of their feelings in post-experimental interviews; and (d) quantifiable responses to questionnaires distributed to subjects several months after their participation in the experiment.

Experimental Variations

Greatly surprised by their initial findings, Milgram and his research team carried out numerous variations of the basic experimental design in order to ascertain the key situational factors governing the dynamics of obedience. These are summarized below. Note that, unless otherwise stated, all experiments were based on the basic design outlined above and used male subjects. Full obedience rates refer to the percentage of subjects and administering the maximum of 450 volts.

- Peer administers shock: similar to basic design except the teacher reads out the word pairs and another volunteer administers the shocks on his behalf Full obedience rate 92%.
- Women as subjects: similar to basic design except that both teacher and learner are female. Full obedience rate = 64%.
- Institutional context: the original experimental design repeated in a rather shabby downtown building, ostensibly by an organization called Research Associates of Bridgeport. Full obedience rate = 48%.
• Increased proximity: similar to basic design except the learner is placed in the same room as teacher at a distance of meter. Full obedience rate = 40%.

• Touch proximity; as above but learner receives shock only when his hand is forced onto a Obedience plate by the teacher. Full obedience rate = 30%.

• An ‘ordinary' man gives the orders: experimenter selects one of the volunteers (a secret accomplice) to take his place. Experimenter remains in room as silent observer. Full obedience rate = 20%.

• Distant authority: experimenter leaves room halfway through the experiment. He explains he will be gone some time and asks the teacher to continue the experiment in his absence. Full obedience rate = 20%.

• Two peers rebel: three teachers participate. Halfway through the experiment, two of them (secret accomplices of the experimenter) refuse to continue administering electric shocks. Full obedience rate = 12%.

• Contradictory authority: two experimenters. One behaves as in basic design, the other expresses concern about the health of the learner and the legitimacy of his colleague's authority. Full obedience rate = 2%.

• Subjects are free to choose the shock level they administer. Full obedience rate = 2%.

• Learner demands to be shocked. Full obedience rate = 2%.

The results came as an unwelcome surprise both to the researchers themselves and to many other presumably sophisticated observers. Most experts had foreseen that very few subjects would push the shock buttons all the way to the maximum. In fact, about 50% followed orders to the hilt, even while believing that they were inflicting very severe electric shock on a screaming middle age man with a heart ailment (something close to that figure holds up for different kinds of people). And the persons giving that orders had no "real" power. He was just a guy in a white coat running the experiment.

What those experiments suggest that people have strong propensity to obey authority. It is not just because we fear sanctions - like getting fired that most of us obey orders. We seem to obey anybody who wears even simplest trappings of authority (in this case white lab coat). Even it is obvious that no different sanctions could be imposed on us for refusal to obey we must fuss and complain, but to disturbing and frightening extent, we also obey.

Perhaps, then, we must be careful as managers in assuming that our organization run smoothly because we are such great managers, such effective users of authority. Rather they run because our subordinates were taught, long before they came to work for, to obey authority. May be we are not as masterfully authoritative as we would like to believe. Those people in fact would obey anybody. And if that is true, perhaps we should be more concerned about how not to use authority than how to use it.

Perhaps we should encourage our subordinates to question our authority and to think for themselves before they obey that order. It is only through such learning experience we can create a condition by which people will learn to assume personal responsibility for their actions. This is an essential condition by which people can be transformed from being dependent to independent and interdependent.

Many managers believe that it is too easy to use authority, and this misunderstanding arise because many of us often confuse between positional authority and authority. These two are not same, they are different. From this confusion arise the belief that authority is very simple to use. Authority in true sense originates from the word "author", in other words creating. A person who has started an enterprise is a creative person, he has more authority than the managers he has employed to achieve results through people. The entrepreneur who has originally started the business has authority, and the employed managers have positional authority. Positional authority has some amount of coercion with it. How it is simple to spank.
a child who misbehaves, and how difficult and complicated it is to distract the child, provide substitute satisfaction, or explain the situation. Given a hundred children it is much easier to keep them in line by punishing few recalcitrant than teaching them all to "feel responsible". And we cannot ignore the fact that exerting authority is personally gratifying to superiors, and therefore attractive. The exercise of discipline over others can be reassuring to those who need reassurance about themselves. Moreover authority fits neatly with organizational superior's needs if they have any, to blow off aggression arising from their own frustration. When parents spank the child they don't just want to change the child's behavior but provide themselves with an outlet for tensions built up in them, by their boss, or spouse, or the irritating, troublesome child.

Similarly, authority is sometimes seen, perhaps properly, as a way for organizational superiors to guarantee their superiority. If your subordinates know that you can and will punish readily, they are likely to behave respectfully and submissively, at least in your presence. The reassurance derived from these visible demonstration of respect may represent great distortion of true feelings, but can be helpful to the superior's own uncertain psyche.

Positional authority has another kind of advantage i.e. speed. A do-it-or-else order eliminates the time consuming dilly-dallying of feedback. But speed may cost accuracy and morale. Where these issues are not critical, speed may be worth its cost. Positional authority, also has the advantage of imposing orderliness and conformity in an organization. Large number of people can be made to conform to fundamental regulations: manager must make sure that his people stay through required eight hours of the day. Even though the great majority may conform without external threat, the superior has to guarantee minimum conformity by all employees. The job of obtaining willing or self-imposed conformity without threat may just look too big to handle. Moreover, such enforced discipline looks efficient because it can be used on large number of people at the same time, even when one doesn't know much about these people.

To instill obedience and conformity in the work situation managers have to use power. Any discussion of power usually begins and sometimes ends with the five categories of the sources of power identified by social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven. Describing and analyzing these five classic types of power (reward; coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert) serves as a necessary foundation.

**Reward Power.** This source of power depends on the person's having the ability and resources to reward others. In addition, the target of this power must value these rewards. In an organizational context, managers have many potential rewards, such as pay increases, promotions, favorable work assignments, more responsibility, new equipment, praise, feedback, and recognition available to them. In operant learning terms; this means that the manager has the power to administer positive reinforcement. In expectancy motivation terms, this means that the person has the power to provide positive valences and that the other person recognizes this ability.

To understand this source of power more completely, one must remember that the recipient holds the key. If managers offer subordinates what they think is a reward (for example, a promotion with increased responsibility), but subordinates do not value it (for example, they are insecure or have family obligations that are more important to them than promotion), then managers do not really have reward power. By the same token, managers may not think they are giving a reward to subordinates (they listen with patience to employee problems), but if subordinates perceive this as rewarding (the managers are giving them attention by intently listening to their problems), the managers nevertheless have reward power. Also, managers may not really have the rewards to dispense (they may say that they have considerable influence with top management to get their people promoted, but actually they don't), but as long as their people think that they have it, they do indeed have reward power.

**Coercive Power.** This source of power depends on fear. The person with coercive power has the ability to inflict punishment or aversive consequences on the other person or, at least, to make threats that the other person believes will result in punishment or undesirable outcomes. This form of power has contributed greatly to negative connotation that power has for most
people. In an organizational context, managers frequently have coercive power in that they can fire or demote subordinates or stop their pay, although the legal climate and unions have stripped away some of this power. Management can also directly or indirectly threaten an employee with these punishing consequences. In operant learning terms, this means that the person has the power to administer punishments or negatively reinforce (terminate punishing consequences, which is a form of negative control). In expectancy motivation terms, this means that power comes from expectation on the part of the other persons that they will be punished if they do not conform to the powerful person's desires. For example, there is a fear of punishment if they do not follow the rules, directives or policies of the organization. It is probably this fear that gets most people to come to work on time and look busy when the boss walks through the area. In other words, much of impression management behavior may be explained in terms of coercive power than reward power.

**Legitimate Power.** This power source, identified by French and Raven, stems from the internalized values of the other persons that give the legitimate right to the agent to influence them. The others feel that they have the obligation to accept this power. It is almost identical to what is usually called positional authority and is closely aligned with both reward and coercive power in that it does not depend on the relationships with others but rather on the position or role that the person holds. For example, people obtain legitimacy because of their title (captain or executive vice president) or position (oldest in the family or officer of a corporation) rather than their personalities or how they affect others.

Legitimate power can come from three major sources. First, the prevailing cultural values of a society, organization, or group determine what is legitimate. For example, in some societies, the older people become the more legitimate power they possess. The same may be true for a certain physical attribute, gender, or job. In an organizational context, managers generally have legitimate power because employees believe in the value of private property laws and in the hierarchy where higher positions have been designed to have power over lower positions. The same holds true for certain functional positions in an organization. An example of the latter would be engineers who have legitimacy in the operations area of a company, while accountants have legitimacy in financial matters. The prevailing values within a group also determine legitimacy. For example, in a street gang the toughest member may have legitimacy, while in a work group the union steward may have legitimacy.

Second, people can obtain legitimate power from the accepted social structure. In some societies there is an accepted ruling class. But an organization or a family may also have an accepted social structure that gives legitimate power. For example, when blue-collar workers accept employment from a company, they are in effect accepting the hierarchical structure and granting legitimate power to their supervisors.

A third source of legitimate power can come from being designated as the agent or representative of a powerful person or group. Elected officials, a chairperson of a committee, and a member of the board of directors of a corporation or a union or management committee would be examples of this for of legitimate power.

Each of these forms of legitimate power creates an obligation to accept and be influenced.

But in actual practice, there are often problems, confusion, or disagreement about the range or scope of this power.

These gray areas point to the real concern that many people in contemporary society have regarding the erosion of traditional legitimacy. These uncertainties also point to the complex nature of power.

**Referent Power.** This type of power comes from the desire on the part of the other persons to identify with the agent wielding power. They want to identify with the powerful person, regardless of the outcomes. The others grant person power because he or she is attractive and has desirable resources or personal characteristics.

Advertisers take advantage of this type of power when they use celebrities, such as movie stars or sports figures, to do testimonial advertising.
The buying public identifies with (finds attractive) certain famous people and grants them power to tell them what product to buy. For example, arguments, especially emotional ones, are more influential when they come from beautiful people, is a common experience in the field of commercial advertisement.

Timing is an interesting aspect of the testimonial advertising type of referent power. Only professional athletes who are in season (for example, cricket players in the winter and football players in the summer) are used in the advertisements, because then they are very visible, they are in the forefront of public's awareness, and consequently they have referent power. Exceptions, of course, are the handful of superstars who transcend seasons and have referent power all year long, and even after they have retired.

In an organizational setting, referent power is much different from the other types of power discussed so far. For example, managers with referent power are attractive to subordinates so that subordinates will want to identify with them, regardless of whether the managers have the ability to reward or punish or whether they have the legitimacy. In other words, the manager who depends on referent power must be personally attractive to subordinates.

**Expert Power.** The last source of power identified by French and Raven is based on the extent to which others attribute knowledge and expertise on the power seeker. Experts are perceived to have knowledge or understanding only in certain well-defined areas. All the sources of power depend on the target's perceptions, but expert power may be even more dependent on this than the others. In particular, the target must perceive the agent to be credible, trustworthy, and relevant before expert power is granted.

Credibility comes from having the right credentials; that is, the person must really know what he or she is talking about and be able to show tangible evidence of this knowledge. There is basic research indicating he significant positive impact that credibility has on perceived power and much evidence from every day experience. For example, if a highly successful cricket coach gives an aspiring young player some advice on how to defend googly, he will be closely listened to - he will be granted expert power. The coach has expert power in this case because he is so knowledgeable about cricket. His evidence for this credibility is the fact that he is a former star player and has coached champion teams. If this coach tried to give advice on how to play basketball or how to manage a corporation, he would have no credibility and thus would have no expert power. For avid cricket fans or players, however, this coach might have general referent power (that is, he is very attractive to them), and they would be influenced by what he has to say on any subject - basketball or corporate management.

In organizations, staff specialists have expert power in their functional areas but not outside them. For example, technicians are granted expert power in technical matters but not in personnel or public relations problems. The same holds true for other staff experts, such as computer experts or accountants. For example, the young accountant in an office may be the only one who really understands the newest financial software and how to use it, and this knowledge gives him or her considerable power. As already implied, however, expert power is highly selective, and besides credibility, the agent must have trustworthiness and relevance. By trustworthiness, it is meant that the person seeking expert power must have a reputation for being honest and straightforward. In the case of political figures, scandals could undermine their expert power in the eyes of the voting public. In addition to credibility and trustworthiness, a person must have relevance and usefulness to have expert power. Going back to the earlier example, if the cricket coach gave advice on world affairs, it would be neither relevant nor useful, and therefore the coach would not have expert power.

It is evident that expertise is the most tenuous 'type of power, but managers and especially staff specialists, who seldom have the other sources of power available to them, often have to depend upon their expertise as their only source of power. As organizations become increasingly technologically complex and specialized, the expert power of the organization members at all levels may become more and more important. This is formally recognized by some companies that deliberately include lower level staff with expert power in top-level
decision making, in other words, they, mix ‘knowledge-power people’ with position-
power people’ daily, so that together they make the decisions that will help them to cope
with rapid changes taking place in the market.

It must also be remembered that French and Raven did recognize that there may be other,
sources of power. For instance, some organizational sociologists such as Crozier
recognize the source of power of task interdependence where two or more organizational
participants must depend on one another. An example would be an executive who has
legitimate power over a subordinate, but because the executive must depend on the
subordinate to get the job done correctly on time, the subordinate also has power over the
executive. There is research evidence indicating that subordinates in such an
interdependent relationship with their boss receive better pay raises and even that such
interdependence can enhance the quality of the professor-student relationship. French and
Raven also point out that the sources are interrelated (for example, the use of coercive
power by managers may reduce their referent power and there is research evidence that
high coercive and reward power may lead to reduced expert power), and the same person
may exercise different types of power under different circumstances and at different
times. The latter point has recently led to some contingency models of power in
organizations.

**Need to look for alternate source of power**

Positional authority which is rooted in the employment contract itself is very limited in
scope. Since it only obligates employees to perform duties assigned to them in accordance
with minimum standards. Therefore, use of positional authority alone does not make
people devote much effort on their own or exercise initiative in carrying it out. Thus it
shows that effective management is not possible within the confines of positional
authority alone.

The power process helps circumscribe idiosyncratic behavior and keeps it conformance to
the rational plan of the organization. Any organization, for the survival requires certain
amount of conformity as well as the integration of diverse activities of its members. The
co-ordination and order created out of the diverse and sometimes conflicting interest and
potentially diffused behavior of its members is largely a function of power.

The increasing number and complexity of organizations in modern industrial societies
require large number of persons with a high level of technical and administrative
expertise to play leadership roles. The demand for expert leaders reduces the suitability of
those recruited on the basis of social status or family connections. Achievement replaced
ascription as the basis for placing leaders, and their recruitment spreads to all strata of
society. Similarly, political criteria, prevalent as the basis of recruitment during early
stages in newly independent and even in revolutionary societies, becomes less
meaningful. At the same time, training center for leaders are established in universities,
business schools, and training institutes, and the possibility for career in industrial
leadership is evenly distributed within the society. Management has become
professionalised. Although these developments are most apparent in business and
industrial organizations and in some government agencies, they are also occurring in
other organizations, including the military and labor unions.

Most of these changes imply a rationalization of the power process in organizations
consistent with Max Weber's bureaucratic model. However, further changes in the way
leaders exercise power are likely to accompany this rationalization, and these represent a
divergence from a classical bureaucratic model. Leaders may rely on discussion and
persuasion rather than on command exclusively. Attempts are made to elicit cooperation,
sometimes by having organization members participate in the making of decisions that
affect them in the work place. The rising level of education of the work force represents
an important "constraint" that contributes to this trend. In addition, the specialized skills
that are frequently required of persons at all levels in modern organizations may
sometimes mean that subordinates are more expert in a particular specialization than their
superiors, thus modifying the classical supervisory-subordinate relationship. Furthermore,
professional managers are more inclined than their predecessors to consider the results of
social science research, which has supported the growth of human-relations approaches to
control in organizations. At the same time, political developments, particularly in some
Asian and European countries, have led to the introduction of schemes of co-management
and of worker's councils, with varying degree of
success. These developments may not be fully consolidated in any contemporary society, but incipient support at least, can be found in many organizations for less autocratic control than was customary in the past. A survey in fourteen developed and developing nations (including India), for example, shows that managers overwhelmingly subscribe at least to the idea of participation by workers in decision making. They, however, express skepticism about the capacity of the workers to assume the responsibilities consonant with democratic leadership (Haire et. al. 1966).

Taken together, these developments imply the growth-actual in some places, potential in other - of new kinds of control in addition to those prevalent in the past. Partly as a consequence of this and of developments in research, conceptions of the power process have been broadened.

First, a change has taken place in the analyses of the bases of power. Coercion has played a prominent role in traditional analysis, consistent with the presumed conflict between leaders and followers. Leaders are obeyed out of fear of punishment or hope for reward. Weber, however, argues that the stability of social systems depends on acceptance by followers of the right of leaders to exercise control. This implied legitimate authority, and Weber defines three types: (1) "Charismatic" authority, according to which leaders are thought to be endowed with extraordinary, sometimes magical powers. Charisma on the part of a leader elicits obedience out of awe. It is illustrated in its pure form by "the prophet, the warrior hero, the great demagogue". (2) "Traditional" authority, appertains to those who have the right to rule by virtue of birth or class. The traditional leader is obeyed because he or members of his class or family have always been followed. Its pure type is illustrated by certain patriarchs, monarchs, and feudal lords. (3) "Legal" authority applies to those who hold leadership positions because of demonstrated technical competence. Legal authorities act impersonally as instruments of the law, and they are obeyed impersonally out of a sense of duty to the law. Leadership in the legal bureaucracy is based exclusively on legal authority.

Simon, however, points to the importance of social approval. Approval and disapproval represent forms of reward and punishment, but they deserve special consideration because they are frequently dispensed, not only by the designated leader, but also by others. Thus, a subordinate may obey a supervisor, not so much because of the rewards and punishment meted out by the supervisor, as because of the approval and disapproval by the subordinate's own peers. Confidence may represent a further basis for acceptance of leader's authority. A subordinate may trust the judgement and therefore accept the authority of the leader in areas where the leader has great technical competence. French and Raven make a further distinction between the influence of a leader based on confidence by subordinate in the leader's expert knowledge and "informational influence" based on acceptance by subordinates of the logic of the arguments that the leader offers. An expert leader, then, may exercise control, not simply because he is an acknowledged authority, but because his decisions, being based on expertise, are manifestly logical, appropriate, and convincing. Subordinates are convinced that the decisions are correct. This is related to some human-relations approaches that stress control by facts as opposed to control by men. Such "fact control" relies on understanding, and is illustrated by the participative leader who influences the behavior of subordinates by helping them understand the facts of a situation so that they may jointly arrive at a course of action consistent with their own interests and that of the collectively. Some of these conceptions represent radical departure from many traditional ones, assuring, as they do, an over-riding communality of interests among all members of the organization.

Other researchers have defined power as the ability to encourage or force others to act in accordance with ones own wishes in order to bring to fruition ones personal goals or aspirations. Zald (1970) maintains the concept of deliberate or intentional control of others behavior but calls attention to a different purpose of the exercise of that power. He defines power as the ability of a person or group, for whatever reason, to effect another person's or group's ability to achieve its own goals (person or collection). In this definition therefore, attention is focused not on the source's attempting to satisfy his own goals but rather on sources ability to get Target to satisfy Target's goals. Others have been more liberal in their definition of power, simply indicating that any interference with autonomy is power, differing only in terms of the sanctions that source can bring to bear on Target for non compliance. All
the definitions under this category perceived the locus (or cause) of power as residing in one person, the source, who is capable of generating change in the Target. Psychologists too are generally given to claiming that power resides in the Source by virtue of that person's ability to marshal greater resources in the eventuality of the conflict. Most of the theories have a rather "chief chicken in the barnyard" flavor about them. Research carried out by the psychologists usually reflects this initial bias by assuming that power resides in the source. One can "find in many laboratory or field experimental situations that the ability of Target to react to an influence or power attempt is severely limited to the purpose of experimental control. In laboratory situation, for example, experimental subjects defined as Targets may only be offered two or three potential courses of actions when exposed to an influence attempt. They may, for example, be able to resist the attempt or to comply with the attempt either partially or totally. It is perfectly obvious that such experimental procedures lead to the maintenance of the myopia of linear causality. The entire experimental procedure is structured to examine the power that resides in the Source" (Swingle, 1976).

A variation in the conception of power relates to the mutuality - unilaterally of control. A view common to traditional analysts argues that the control process is unilateral; one leads or is led, is strong or weak, controls or is controlled. Simmel, in spite of his general adherence to the traditional conflict view of power, noted a more subtle interaction underlying the appearance of "pure superiority" on the part of one person and the "purely passive being led" of another. "All leaders are also led, in innumerable cases the master is the slave of his slaves" (Wolff, 1950). Contemporary analysts are more likely than earlier ones to consider relationships of mutual as well as unilateral power, of followers influencing leaders, and vice versa.

Finally, traditional analysis of social power assumes that the total amount of power in a system is a fixed quantity and that leaders and followers are engaged in a "zero sum game": increasing the power of one party must be accompanied by the corresponding decrease in the power of the other. Some social scientists are now inclined to question the generality of this assumption, and it is believed that the total amount of power in a system may grow, and leaders and followers may therefore enhance their power jointly. Total power may also decline, and all groups within the system may suffer corresponding decreases. In the contemporary times major challenge of the managers is to increase total power in the relationships structure in work organizations. For this they have no other alternative but look for ways and means of empowering people around, and not to be concerned with conformity and obedience from their subordinates.

Human beings show an eternal desire to be able to reestablish routines that are predictable, maintain their confidence about performing well, and reaffirm, and reaffirm their sense of personal control in the work setting. Otherwise, in the absence of such conditions, uncertainty prevails. Uncertainty leads to the experience of aversive feelings of loss, anxiety, and lack of control. When people feel that they have little hope of reducing uncertainty or reasserting control, they tend to develop feelings of helplessness. Attribution of lack of control even to global factors leads to generalization of helplessness symptoms across situations. Feeling of helplessness leads to many dysfunctional behavior syndromes in the individual, which has negative consequences on the performance, and on the work organization where the individual is employed. Helplessness often causes depression, lack of motivation, cognition, and emotion. More importantly, as the experimental researches indicate, the individual tends to generalize such feelings to new situations when uncontrollability no longer exists. Such feelings, specially among the organizational members prove to be too costly for any organization, since it is these very people who are important and responsible for the continuance, growth, and development of any organization. Probably, it is due to this realization that the managers always enjoy more power and authority so that things remain predictable to them. In fact, loss of power, and erosion of authority are the two major indicators of helplessness.

A work culture characterized by obedience and conformity have strong potentiality to generate helplessness among the organizational members. As a result people become unable to give the best to the organization. Therefore, there is a strong need to examine obsessive
concern for obedience since that may lead to the feeling of helplessness. Overcoming helplessness will go a long way in instilling confidence both to the organization and the organizational members.

4.10 WHY AND HOW OF EMPOWERMENT

Erosion of authority is a phenomenon permeating the contemporary Indian society. For quite sometime, we have witnessed people showing utter contempt and disregard for authority - it is being questioned, disputed, resented, and also challenged. Work organizations, being a part of the larger, society, cannot shield themselves from the impact of such an onslaught. As a sequel, we hear managers complaining about reduced power. They experience reduced power because of the erosion of positional authority, which is a major constituent of managerial power following French and Ravens topology. Along with this, responsibility and accountability of an individual manager is also increasing substantially, and so is his span of control. In such a changed situation of increased responsibility, coupled with reduced authority, the managers have many options to follow. One approach could be to increase one's power substantially by creating dependency in others. (Das and Cotton, 1988). The second approach is to 'turning the so called followers into leaders'. This is possible to achieve by empowering those who are deprived of power. Empowering seems to be beneficial in the work situation, as many researchers have observed that deprivation of power generate hostility, suspicion, and lack of commitment to what goes on in the organization. Whereas in work organizations by design, members in the higher echelons enjoy more power than people below, and the members from lower category are deprived of power. Arising out of such understanding is the concern for empowering the subordinates as a contributing factor of managerial and organizational effectiveness. It has been observed that the empowered subordinates develop a sense of competence, voluntarily share the superior's responsibility, participate in the change process, and assume personal responsibility.

Empowering subordinates has taken various forms in India over the years. Some reflections of empowering attempts can be seen in the efforts to involve the employees in decision-making; in other words, participative forms of management. In participation, power is shared. Sharing power is a lower form of empowering. As early as 1918, TISCO management made the first attempt to involve workers in management. Subsequently, in 1921, the Government of West Bengal urged the industries in setting up workers' committees as a remedial action to prevent industrial unrest. After that, different mechanisms were developed to democratize the work environment in the Indian organizations. Among these, work committees set up in 1947, joint management councils, in 1957, workers directors, in 1970, and shop and joint councils setup in 1975 are noteworthy.

Several researchers claim that participative management was a miserable failure in India. According to some the main reasons for the failure of participative management, among others, are: employer managers are skeptical about the capability of participating workmen, employer-managers believed that decision-making was their prerogative, and sharing power is equivalent to reducing one's own power.

In recent years, quality circle (QC) has become quite popular in the Indian work organizations. Quality circle has many elements in it which lead to empowerment. For example, allowing a group to find solution to their own problem rather than to depend upon others for advice, has distinct possibility of increasing a strong sense of efficacy, leading to empowerment. However, there is some basic difference between the concept and practice of participative form of management and quality circle. The former always enjoyed the blessings of the powers-that-be, they always came as a part of the legislation or a government scheme. Whereas, participation in QC is more of a voluntary nature, and so far no government directive has been handed about QC (so good!). It is nonetheless, necessary to remember that quality circle too, like participative management, has encountered severe setbacks. These two traditional ways of empowering although do enhance the feeling of self efficacy among organizational members, the approach is basically formal and structural. The way innumerable well-intentioned government sponsored schemes fail in India is any
Conformity and freedom, obedience and empowerment has been a constant source of conflict since the inception of civilization. Having defined conformity and obedience this unit explains in detail ten situational factors that influence an individual's response to group conformity pressures. Moving further in this unit we have explained the dynamics of responses to the group pressures in the form of Compliance and Identification. Conformity, Compliance and Identification are relatively transient responses to group pressure but internalization is not. The satisfaction given by internalisation is intense, this allows the influence to become

4.11 SUMMARY

Conformity and freedom, obedience and empowerment has been a constant source of conflict since the inception of civilization. Having defined conformity and obedience this unit explains in detail ten situational factors that influence an individual's response to group conformity pressures. Moving further in this unit we have explained the dynamics of responses to the group pressures in the form of Compliance and Identification. Conformity, Compliance and Identification are relatively transient responses to group pressure but internalization is not. The satisfaction given by internalisation is intense, this allows the influence to become
independent of the source and an integral part of the internalizer. Further this unit explains in detail Milgram's study on the dynamics of obedience to authority.

To instill obedience and conformity in the work situation managers have to use power. This unit has explained the five categories of the sources of power identified by John French and Bertram Raven viz., Reward Power, Coercive Power, Legitimate Power, Referent Power and Expert Power, along with the need for looking at alternative sources of power. Towards the end this unit has touched upon the outcome of the dynamics of power in the organization and coping strategies against the expected results i.e. why and how of empowerment.

### 4.12 Self Assessment Questions

1. What do you understand by the term conformity; explain? Describe the situational factors that influence an individual's response to group conformity.

2. Compliance is another possible response to the influence a group can exert. Elaborate this statement, explain the underlying concept.

3. Explain the experiment and important outcomes of Milgram's study on the dynamics of obedience and authority.

4. Write short notes on the following:
   (i) Reward Power
   (ii) Legitimate Power
   (iii) Referent power
   (iv) Expert power

### 4.13 FURTHER READINGS