

Power Dynamics of a Non-Hierarchical Team

In a non-hierarchical team, leadership roles are not formally established. Teams may work much more closely together without layers of communication that can cause division in the team and hinder progress. Without a hierarchical structure, however, teams tend to form their own informal hierarchies based on perceived power and behavior. Several types of power may lead an individual in this type of team to be recognized as a leader of the team. The most effective, in my opinion, is referent power. An individual's natural leadership skills, charisma, ability to form relationships and build trust are all elements of referent power. These are the qualities that make team members comfortable and motivated. Regardless, I believe that expert power should be the most effective to being recognized as a leader. This is the power an individual gains from having specialized expertise, skills and knowledge that others typically do not have and are necessary to accomplishing the goals of the organization. Effective leadership comes best from a place of expertise about the goal and the methods needed to achieve it. Both referent and expert power, however, are common and critical in an unstructured non-hierarchical system. Referent power can inspire the other team members, help the team adapt to different situations and respond to the needs of the individuals on the team. Expert power is necessary to understand what directions the team must go in order to accomplish defined goals. Expert leaders have the ability to guide the team in solving problems, particularly when the team is struggling with these challenges. People who emerge as leaders in a non-hierarchical team do not often have the leverage to use reward or coercive power, as the ability to give out rewards or consequences is most commonly provided with legitimate power. With no legitimate power, these leaders have to be creative with the motivations they give their fellow team members. That being said, team members who emerge as leaders in a non-hierarchical team have the unique ability to exercise their expertise without being limited by their position when in a follower role. They also have greater opportunity to gain influence over other team members and exercise referent power because they are not as limited by the definition of their role.