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Review of “Seven Rules of Power. Surprising — but true — advice on how to get things done and advance your career” by Jeffrey Pfeffer

Jeffrey Pfeffer's book “Seven Rules of Power” offers a comprehensive exploration of organizational power dynamics, challenging traditional perceptions and providing research-based insights into career advancement. In this comprehensive review of the book, the author provides an overview of each book's chapter, highlighting its research-driven approach to understanding power in professional environments and interpreting Pfeffer's key arguments and strategies for personal development. The book presents seven fundamental rules for understanding and effectively utilizing power in professional environments. Pfeffer argues that power is a neutral tool that can be strategically employed to achieve personal and organizational goals. The book guides readers through stages of understanding power, from denial to acceptance, and provides practical strategies for building personal influence. Key topics include overcoming self-limiting beliefs, breaking conventional rules, appearing powerful, developing a personal brand, networking strategically, and actively using acquired power. Drawing from social science research, Pfeffer emphasizes the importance of self-promotion, non-verbal communication, and creating valuable connections. The book encourages professionals to understand and navigate organizational landscapes more effectively by embracing power as a constructive tool for personal and professional growth.

Keywords: organizational power, career advancement, professional development, leadership, strategic networking, personal branding, influence, professional success

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Introduction to the Book Review

The book was published in 2022 by the Swift Press Publishing House. The same year, it was also published by the US' BenBella Books Publishing. It was again published in 2023 by the Great Britain's Swift Press. Immediately, the book became a great success because it is firmly based in social science research and provides research-based ideas on how to advance one's career and create positive improvement at one's job. The author of the book — Stanford University's professor Jeffrey Pfeffer — is well known in the world as an outstanding expert on organizational power. Professor Pfeffer has been studying the topic of power for many years, therefore, his books and articles, — as well as this book — are great sources of insights on organizational power issue.

This book review provides an overview of each book's chapter with some analysis of the ideas presented there.

Book Review

Introduction

In this section, Pfeffer talks about the fact that although many people consider organizational power as a bad thing, in reality, it is neutral. Power is a tool. "Like most tools, power, once mastered, can be used to accomplish great things, terrible things, and everything in between" [1, p. 3]. So, it depends on a person and his/her goals how power is used. However, by itself power is not bad. It is present in most of social relationships among people. Power is necessary to get things done in any organization. This is why it is important to always take the reality of power into consideration. If it is not paid attention to, it is like "attempting to build a rocket without adhering to the laws of physics and thermodynamics" [1, p. xvi]. Power is present throughout times and spaces. It is not ending, as well as its manifestations. Therefore, "to effectively lead in a world... people need to understand the basic principles — the rules — of power" [1, (p. xix).

As professor Pfeffer explains, an individual's realization of the reality of power usually passes through several stages:

Denial stage. People do not want to believe that a just and fair world does not always exist.

"Because many of the real principles of power diverge from what many people have read or heard... the first reaction will be to try to deny the validity of the ideas. Denial occurs even though people have seen and will keep seeing manifestations of power and political behavior in their daily lives" [1, p. 10]. Yet, denying the ubiquity of power in organizational life has strong consequences.

Anger stage. Denial is often followed by anger. Often, people do not want to hear the things they do not like. Therefore, they get angry at those who tell them the unpleasant facts about the pervasiveness of power in the world and lots of negative manifestations of power.

Sadness stage. After people finally recognize what power is and that principles of power are true, people often become unhappy. They do not like the reality that they hear and the implications for their own behavior.

Acceptance stage. The last stage of the process is acceptance. After people have had time to think about and experience the consequences of power, they stop denying it and they stop being angry or sad at the reality of its existence. People accept this reality. "People come not only to recognize what they need to do to change lives, organizations and the world, they understand that they only have the choice of learning the rules of power and using them, or opting out with all that the idea of opting out implies" [1, p. 12].

After this section, the author of the book presents seven chapters each of which talks about one rule of power:

1. Get out of your own way.
2. Break the rules.
3. Appear powerful.
4. Build a powerful brand.
5. Network relentlessly.
6. Use your power.
7. Success excuses almost everything you may have done to acquire power.

Following is a detailed description and analysis of every chapter.

Chapter 1. "Get out of your own way"

As the author explained, "this rule of power is about acknowledging and accepting who you are but not letting that identity define who you will be forever. It is about understanding the importance of social connection but not letting the need for acceptance overwhelm what you want

to get done, and the necessity of pursuing your own interest and agenda. It is, in short, about getting out of your way and getting on with the task of building power base that will provide you the leverage to accomplish your goals" [1, p. 44]. What does the author mean by this? Professor Pfeffer starts the chapter explaining that people have many beliefs that really stand on their way of achieving success. For example, some people have a so-called "imposter syndrome" — a psychological term which "refers to a pattern of behavior wherein people (even with adequate external evidence of success) doubt their abilities" [1, p. 21]. This is a very harmful belief, because imposter syndrome can lead to a cycle of self-defeating behavior. It is very important to eliminate such a syndrome. The author suggests several effective methods of how to do it. According to Pfeffer, one way of getting over this weakness is "to focus on others in high-level positions, and their differences from you, if any. Many of them are no more qualified than you are" [1, p. 22]. Another method is to think about yourself and describe yourself to others in positive, rather than self-deprecating ways. "Others are not likely to think more favorably of you than you do of yourself. Colleagues expect that you will, at least to some extent, self-advocate and self-promote — and if you don't that behavior will be held against you" [1, p. 22].

The author also suggests that it is important to be willing to do whatever it takes and not to run away from power. To achieve this, it is advisable to be more flexible and strategic in your thinking. While elaborating on this, professor Pfeffer points to a very important reality of organizational life, "Different people are willing to do different things in order to succeed. Just because you don't network or flatter or self-promote, certainly does not mean that all of your competitors will be as circumspect. To the extent people opt out of doing things that their colleagues are willing to do — tactics that build power — they put themselves in a disadvantage" [1, p. 27]. This is why the author of the book suggests learning new skills and techniques which can help them get more power in organizations. He states, "doing things that increase your power — that are possible to learn and implement regardless of who you are" [1, p. 37] is crucially important. Even if a person feels strongly against developing these skills, it is still crucially import-

ant to understand the issue and to understand what tactics others may use in their organizational career pursuits.

The author also takes time to elaborate on the so-called "paradox of 'likability.'" It turns out that (and this is true across different cultures) the two fundamental concepts by which people judge others are *warmth* and *competence*, and although these two concepts are different, people tend to view them as negatively related. This means that people view warmth and friendliness as inferior to competence. If a person is warm and friendly, this person is viewed as less competent, and this is viewed as a weakness. Furthermore, a quality of agreeableness is viewed as negatively related to career success. Alternatively, negative people tend to be viewed as more intelligent and competent. It is always necessary to take this into consideration.

As a summary of the chapter, Jeffrey Pfeffer writes, "the first rule of power is about acknowledging and accepting who you are but not letting that identity define who you will be forever. It is about understanding the importance of social connection but not letting the need for acceptance overwhelm what you want to get done, and the necessity of pursuing your own interests and agenda. It is, in short, about getting out of your own way and getting on with the task of building the power base that will provide you the leverage to accomplish your goals" [1, p. 44].

Chapter 2. Break the rules

Professor Pfeffer says that it is not always helpful to follow all rules. He suggests that at times improving the rules is very helpful, which "entails undertaking behaviors — taking initiatives — that are "different" and unexpected" [1, p. 48]. The author explains that there are several psychological mechanisms that support the idea that changing rules can make the person more powerful. Of course, everyone is expected to follow rules and adhere to them. However, the dilemma is that "while people want to fit in and be accepted by others, people also want to stand out. If people blend in too perfectly, they become unnoticeable, undifferentiated from those around them competing for promotions. People also want to excel, and to excel is to be, by definition, different" [1, p. 57]. As such, it is of utmost importance to take this reality into consideration while you are building and developing your career.

Chapter 3. *Appear powerful*

- The title of this chapter is “Appear Powerful.” What does the author mean by this? As professor Pfeffer says, “appearance — how someone shows up both with body language and spoken language — matters a great deal for how others perceive them. These perceptions then guide other’s decisions about that individual” [1, p. 84]. Pfeffer provides numerous ideas to support his statement. He says that “if you want to attain and maintain power, the rule of power is to appear powerful, because others will treat you and make decisions about you depending on how you show up, and those decisions will often act in ways to make the initial impressions become true” [1, p. 67]. How to use these statements in practical way? Pfeffer says that appearance matters and predicts others’ attitudes. This is why he suggests to control non-verbal language, and to use only that nonverbals which convey power. He gives an example of an experiment where students watched soundless short clips of videos of instructors teaching — the students who did not know those instructors. They were then asked to give their evaluations about those instructors in terms of confidence, dominance, honesty, and empathy. Then the students who actually took courses with those instructors were also asked to provide their evaluations. It turned out that the correlation between the scores that both groups of students provided was at the very high level of 0.8. The group of students who did not know the instructors got the impression thanks to the instructors’ non-verbal language. Pfeffer summarizes that “these empirical results are why it is fair and accurate to say that in numerous ways, and in many different contexts and settings, appearance matters and predicts career outcomes and attributions of power” [1, p. 70]. The author provides some ideas of non-verbal behavior which conveys power. They are as follows [1, p. 81]:
- Louder voice.
- More speaking time.
- Longer eye contact with others

- More disinhibited laughs.
- More controlled arms and hand gestures.

The book’s author also makes a very important note between drawback of displaying sadness or remorse. He says that certain emotional displays convey strength, while others do not. It is obvious, therefore that it is important to convey powerful emotions and avoid expressing those that signal lower status. “People expressing anger are seen as dominant, strong, competent, and smart” [1, p. 75]. Furthermore, “people believe that individuals with angry facial expressions occupy more powerful social positions than do individuals with sad facial expressions” [1, p.75].

In this chapter, the author also discusses the importance of self-confidence. He suggests that regardless of what a person is feeling at a particular moment, in spite of maybe not feeling confident, a leader should project confidence so that his/her subordinates will be confident and keep working well. Pfeffer explains that people want to be proud of what they are involved with and to believe that they and their organizations will be successful. This is why one of the most important tasks of a leader is to project confidence. “When someone projects confidence, others are more likely to also feel confident and act accordingly” [1, p. 78]. In such a case subordinates will perform well and better contribute toward success of their organization, thus making confidence real. So, even “fake” confidence of a leader can bring great positive results. Even speaking about regular employees, not leaders, Jeffrey Pfeffer points that it is acceptable to express vulnerabilities and insecurities with friends, but “in high-status and task-relevant positions, you are much better off keeping any insecurities to yourself” [1, p.80].

Professor Pfeffer also gives some ideas about a powerful speech. According to him, a powerful speech has several characteristics. First, it is simple without difficult, industry-specific words and terminology. Second, it is easy to understand. Third, important points are repeated several times for people to remember them well.

The author concludes the chapter by suggesting developing skills “to appear powerful to the extent possible” [1, p. 85].

Chapter 4. *Build a powerful brand*

Professor Pfeffer suggested that building own personal brand is connected to the idea of

self-promotion. To some people, who prefer being modest and hope that someone else will do this job for them, this idea sounds hard. However, according to the author, “recent research shows that hiding success, although common in everyday life as people have been told to be modest, actually has interpersonal costs” [1, p. 106]. This cost includes slow career progression, not being noticed and known and so on.

Building a personal brand is associated with expanding network strategically and significantly and taking steps to stand out from the crowd. By taking such steps, one’s “credibility, connections, and power would grow” [1, p. 89]. Through taking steps toward building a personal brand, someone can differentiate themselves in a very competitive reality of work. This is why Jeffrey Pfeffer suggests everyone that they create their own personal brand and tell it repeatedly. To achieve this, he suggests the following exercise: “think of a short (2-3 sentences) way of describing yourself and your accomplishments that bring together your expertise, your experience, and a way of integrating that with some aspect of your personal story” [1, p. 91]. The book’s author suggests telling your own story “before someone else does.”

An important rule of developing a corresponding good look should also be remembered. According to Pfeffer, “the idea of using clothes and physical appearance as part of branding is not a new or unique idea, but that does not make it any less important” [1, p. 93]. Pfeffer even uses some humor while pointing out that “the frequent commentary on different or unusual CEO appearance makes the point that people need to think carefully about what they want to convey through their look and then do things consistent with that objective” [1, p. 93]. Very insightfully, Pfeffer says that individuals who pay close attention to how they look to strategically form an impression of how others view them, seek to convey through their appearance and their look, that they should be taken seriously, that they have resources, and that they need to be treated accordingly.

Some practical methods, which Jeffrey Pfeffer suggests in terms of personal branding are the following:

- Run/participate in podcasts.
- Write a book/article.
- Speak at conferences. Start your own event popular among many people.

Professor Pfeffer also suggests cultivating the media, in a sense of taking time to spend with media. Journalists need good journalist materials to write their articles. Sometimes it is not easy for them to get enough of quality materials. Therefore, somebody who is willing to meet with them, give interviews — anything which helps the media to do their job with less effort — is appreciated. This way everyone wins — journalist get good information to write a good interesting article, and the person about whom the article is written gets good publicity. Pfeffer explains that “one of the best ways to tell a story — particularly a flattering account of yourself you have developed — is to have others tell it on your behalf, because of self-promotion dilemma” [1, p.97]. This dilemma is about the fact, that on one hand, people are expected to tell good things about themselves, however, on another hand, there is often social disapproval if someone boasts about themselves. This is why having somebody “to sing praises for you” is better. As Pfeffer explains, “research shows that if a person sings someone else’s praise — even if that person has a financial incentive to do so, such as an agent — many of the downsides of self-promotion disappear” [1, p. 98]. This way the media can be an excellent advocate and advertiser, even if the media is directly or indirectly paid to do this.

Another crucially important factor in terms of personal brand building, which the book’s author talks about, is that it is possible to stand out by being appropriately controversial. For example, he gave an example of the first ranking of business schools created by the *BusinessWeek* journal in 1988. In that ranking list, the *BusinessWeek* put as number one not the really best business schools, like Harvard, or Stanford, or Wharton, or MIT, but Northwestern Business School. At that time the Northwestern was good, but not really the very best one. So, that ranking got many organizations, universities, and people talking about it. Pfeffer sums up that “an unobvious choice, a controversial position, draws attention” [1, p. 100].

One more factor that cannot be overlooked if a person wants to build their personal brand is that it is important to take credit for one’s own work. Pfeffer suggests not to exercise false modesty when it is necessary to tell about your accomplishments. He explains that “bosses and

colleagues are busy and are often focused on their own objectives. Don't expect them to necessarily notice or credit your accomplishments" [1, p. 103]. It is also important to do it appropriately frequently.

Overall, Jeffrey Pfeffer sums up that building a personal brand is crucially beneficial if a person wants to have organizational power at work.

Chapter 5. Network relentlessly

Networking is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as the action or process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional and social contacts. As the book's author put it, the old saying that it is not what you know but who you know has at least some truth to it. Who you know, and how many people you know, matters for your influence and for your career [1, p. 110]. According to Jeffrey Pfeffer, "humans are social creatures, so most people do spend some of their free time interacting with others. The problem... is that much of this interaction is with family and friends, not with bosses, colleagues from work, or others who might be professionally useful. For example, a study using American Time Use Survey diary data found that on average people spent 112.9 minutes — just about two hours — per day socializing, but only 9 of those minutes were socializing with colleagues. Another survey of more than twelve thousand business professionals found that individuals who said that networking played a role in their success spent an average of 6.3 hours per week on networking, while those who maintained that networking did not play a role in their success networked just two hours per week or less" [1, p. 111]. The conclusion is that to get business success through networking requires time investment in it. According to a longitudinal study of more than a hundred employees for three years found that "networking was the most robust predictor of career success" [1, p. 114]. Furthermore, "networking ability dominated other aspects of political skill in its ability to explain career outcomes including total compensation, promotions, and career and life satisfaction" [1, p. 114]. Jeffrey Pfeffer cites one more research which concludes that "networking leads to increased visibility and power, job performance, organizational access to strategic information, and career success" [1, p. 114].

After explaining the great importance of networking, Jeffrey Pfeffer shares the fundamental principles of successful networking.

One of them is called "Pursue your 'Weak Ties.'" What does it mean? To explain this concept, professor Pfeffer tells about a study of the job-finding process conducted in the early 1970s. It turned out that most job-seekers found their jobs not through formal channels (such as job applications or responding to job advertisements) but through informal information which they got from their acquaintances/social ties. "The surprising finding was that the ties that were most useful for finding a job were not the strong ties with family, friends, and close work colleagues, but instead the ties with casual acquaintances — so-called weak ties" [1, p. 118]. What is the reason for this? The explanation for this fact is surprisingly simple and it makes perfect sense. "People to whom one is strongly tied are likely to be strongly tied to each other, and therefore share mostly the same information, contacts, and perspectives. People to whom one is weakly tied, are more likely to tap into different sources and social circles, and are therefore more likely to be able to provide non-redundant information and contacts. This non-redundant information has higher value because of its greater novelty" [1, p. 118]. What does this practically mean? It means that it is necessary to uphold contacts with distant acquaintances as well instead of just spending time always with the best close friends. Keeping such contacts does not take much time. Professor Pfeffer suggests, for example, emailing an article of mutual interest, or sending a Happy Birthday note, etc. It does not take much time, but helps keeping the relationships with the distant contacts. Such contacts may be very valuable.

Another fundamental principle of successful networking is called "Become a broker." What does it mean? To understand the meaning of this principle, it is necessary to remember who a broker is. A broker brings together parties who could benefit from knowing each other and cooperating. The person who fulfills this role gets great benefit for themselves in terms of increased network, visibility, respect and power possession.

One more fundamental principle of successful networking is called "Be central." As Pfeffer

put it, “centrality brings visibility” [1, p. 122]. As he explains, “more people will know and know about people who are more central, and that visibility will often work to those people’s advantage for becoming the focal point for information and opportunities” [1, p. 122]. Centrality also gives access to information. The more information an individual has, the better such an individual is located in an organization in terms of access to resources and power application.

The last fundamental principle of successful networking is called “Create value for others.” The title is self-explanatory. With networking, it is necessary to make sure that all people involved benefit from being in the network. A person will help another one, however, if the another one will not care to reciprocate or help another one, such a relationship will disappear. This is why it is necessary to uphold mutually beneficial relationships.

Professor Pfeffer gives a practical idea of developing networking skill. For example: determine the people to whom you would like to be connected and develop (and implement) a plan how to develop these relationships.

Chapter 6. Use your power

In this chapter professor Pfeffer explains that just having power is not enough. It is necessary to use it. According to him, “by demonstrating power and the willingness to use it, by accomplishing things, and by establishing structures institutionalize power, the use of power becomes self-reinforcing” [1, p. 141]. It is crucially important to remember that power is not some resource which can be depleted by being used. On the contrary, the more an individual uses power to accomplish things, the more power this individual will have. “Using power signals that you have it, and because people are attracted to power, the more you use your power and demonstrate that you are powerful, the more allies you will accumulate... Using power effectively is more likely to perpetuate it than to exhaust it” [1, p. 129].

The book’s author suggests new leaders to use power quickly. He provides an example of the US President Lyndon Johnson. As soon as Johnson became the President, he immediately began taking actions to change and improve things in the country. He did not waste time in

using his power. As Pfeffer explains, “Johnson understood three things. First, when a person is new in a position, they have time, before their opponents get a chance to coalesce, and while the incumbent is in sort of honeymoon period, to get a lot done” [1, p.128]. Jeffrey Pfeffer points out to the fact, that when a leader makes good and positive changes by using his/her power, people come to the leader’s side and want to participate and help, which significantly enhances the leader’s performance. Making positive changes and improvements quickly increases the leader’s power because it gives people a reason to support the leader. As with any leader, soon there will be those who will want to sabotage his/her effort. This is why using power soon to create good is really important.

Chapter 7. Success excuses almost everything

In this chapter, professor Pfeffer explains that after an individual achieves a position of power, their methods of getting there are often forgiven or excused: “power itself makes many problems, including what someone did to acquire that power, mostly disappear” [1, p. 146]. The author of the book points to the situation that “possessing power and status, occupying a dominant position, also calls forth social processes that act to perpetuate someone’s power...Many organizational and social dynamics perpetuate advantage once acquired rather than diminish it” [1, p. 147]. There are many explanations for such a situation. For example, the more powerful and successful someone is, the more likely it will be that talented people will want to work with such an individual. Consequently, this increases success of the entire organization and of the powerful person. Furthermore, the more powerful and successful someone is, the more access to resources this person has. People generally want to associate with someone with good access to resources. Another reason explaining this effect is so-called confirmation bias. “Confirmation bias — the tendency for perception to confirm preexisting beliefs — suggests that once someone has enjoyed success, that individual will be perceived as successful again in the future, regardless of objective measures of results” [1, p.150]. All these reasons together explain why the title of the chapter seems to be close to reality.

Conclusion to the Book Review

In this book review, we have provided a detailed account of all the book chapters to the interested reader. The book has many good new ideas. They are novel for many people. As Jeffrey Pfeffer said, the lessons and principles of this book do not come naturally to many, and are not automatic or easy to do. This is why Pfeffer suggests practicing implementing the explained seven rules regularly until they become a habit.

References:

1. Pfeffer, J. (2022). *Seven rules of power: Surprising — but true — advice on how to get things done and advance your career*. Swift Press.

Верхогляд О. О.

Рецензія на книгу Джефрі Пфеффера “Seven Rules of Power. Surprising — but true — advice on how to get things done and advance your career”

Книга Джефрі Пфеффера «Сім правил влади» пропонує всебічне дослідження динаміки організаційної влади, кидаючи виклик традиційним уявленням і надаючи науково обґрунтовану інформацію про кар'єрне зростання. У своїй рецензії автор подає ґрунтовний огляд кожного розділу книги, висвітлюючи дослідницький підхід Джефрі Пфеффера до розуміння влади в професійному середовищі та інтерпретуючи його ключові аргументи й стратегії особистого розвитку. Книга представляє сім фундаментальних правил для розуміння та ефективного використання влади у професійному середовищі. Пфеффер стверджує, що влада — це нейтральний інструмент, який можна стратегічно використовувати для досягнення особистих та організаційних цілей. «Сім правил влади» проводять читачів через етапи розуміння влади — від заперечення до прийняття — та пропонує практичні стратегії створення особистого впливу. Серед ключових тем — подолання самообмежувальних переконань, порушення загальноприйнятих правил, вміння здаватися впливовим, розвиток особистого бренду, стратегічне налагодження зв'язків та активне використання набутої влади. Спираючись на дослідження в галузі соціальних наук, Джефрі Пфеффер підкреслює важливість самореклами, невербальної комунікації та створення цінних зв'язків. Автор рецензії відзначає унікальне розуміння Джефрі Пфеффером парадоксів професійної поведінки, таких як взаємозв'язок між приємністю та компетентністю, важливість демонстрації сили, а також необхідності дотримуватися «семи правил влади» щоденно, поки вони не стануть звичкою.

Ключові слова: організаційна влада, кар'єрне зростання, професійний розвиток, лідерство, стратегічний нетворкінг, стратегічне налагодження зв'язків, особистий бренд, самореклама, вплив, професійний успіх