Module 2 Session 3:

I’d like to spend a bit of time talking about Forms of Power and how they relate to project management. The type of power I’m referring to relates to a person’s ability to influence others to produce an outcome.

I’ve had some past class participants that had a negative perception of the word “power”, but power by its very nature is neither positive nor negative. It becomes either positive or negative by the way it’s used, and effective leaders learn to use power in a collaborative, supportive way.

Project Managers (especially those in matrix and functional organizations) are often tasked with responsibility for the project – without very much formal authority in the organization. Understanding the forms of power can help the project manager maximize the ability to lead, influence, and manage the team.

Let’s look at some of the forms of power...

Reward Power is when you have the ability to give rewards and recognition. Examples would include – a pay raise, time off, bonus, or any type of reward that would motivate a team member...

Expert Power exists when the project manager (or team member) is a subject matter expert in the realm of the project. For instance, the person who architected a part of the software system would probably have significant Expert Power on a project that later used that system. People would listen to that architect because he/she had credibility and expertise...

Legitimate Power is the power that the manager has because of his/her position. This type of power comes from formally being in charge of the project and has the backing of the organization...

The next form of power we’ll cover is Referent Power...and Referent Power is a form of power that's based on respect or the charismatic personality of the manager. Another usage of referent power is when a manager is allied with a more powerful person – and leverages the superior’s power. (i.e. the PM is very close to the CEO of the company).

Punishment or Coercive Power is the ability to punish an employee if a goal is not met. If you hear something like this – “If this system interface doesn't pass quality control testing by the end of next week, you’re all fired” would be an example of a manager who’s demonstrating punishment power.

For the CPPM exam – or PMP exam for that matter – you should be able to identify these various forms of power. You should also know that the exam favors Reward and Expert as the most effective forms of power – and it considers Punishment as the least effective form of power.