Power and Interdependence in Organizations

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13 | *Bases of leader power and effectiveness*

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Power is certainly one of the major areas of scientific investigation in organizational behavior and organization theory. The phenomena of social power are pervasive in all groups, organizations, and societies. In an organizational setting, the process of exercising power serves as one of the key characteristics which define the relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate (Pfeffer 1992; Yukl 2006; see also Raven et al. 1998). Acquisition, maintenance, and use of the right types of power are essential for effective leadership.

Power can be defined as the ability of one party to change or control the behavior, attitudes, opinions, objectives, needs, and values of another party (Rahim 1989). Raven et al. (1998: 307) provided a complimentary definition of social power as the "resources one person has available so that he or she can influence another to do what that person would not have done otherwise." These definitions imply that the theory of power for this chapter is limited to interpersonal influence, i.e. the influence of one individual (leader) over another individual (follower). That is, it deals with the interpersonal and not the structural and situational sources of power. The reason behind this restriction is that it is not easily possible to investigate both sources in one chapter. It should be noted that power possessed by a supervisor is important to influence not only subordinates, but also colleagues, supervisors, and people outside the organization.

Power bases differ from *influence attempts* as the former is associated with the capacity to use power and the latter with the actual use of power. Compliance with the wishes of a supervisor is a function of the power possessed as well as power used by a supervisor.

Several classifications of leader or supervisory power have been set forth, but the bases of power taxonomy suggested by French and Raven (1959), coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent, still appears to be fairly representative and popular in application. This five-category power nomenclature has dominated the conceptualization of interpersonal sources of power for nearly five decades. There were

attempts to expand this set to include "information" and other power bases, but Gaski (1986: 62) has argued that, "these alleged power sources appear to be already captured by the French and Raven framework." Aguinis et al. (1996), Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989), Pearce and Robinson (1987), Rahim (1988), and Stahelski, Frost, and Patchen (1989) provided empirical evidence of this framework.

The objective of this chapter is to review the diverse literature in order to develop guidelines for enabling leaders to acquire, maintain, and use power bases to effectively influence not only subordinates, but also colleagues, supervisors, and people outside the organization. This was done by reviewing the nature of these power bases, their measures, and how they influence each other and criterion variables, such as compliance with supervisor's wishes, commitment, styles of handling conflict with supervisor, and job performance in the American and cross-cultural contexts.

French and Raven power bases

As discussed by French and Raven (1959), the five types of social power are as follows:

1. Coercive power.
2. Reward power.
3. Legitimate power.
4. Expert power.
5. Referent power.

Coercive power

Coercive power is based on a subordinate's perception that their supervisor has the ability to punish them if they fail to conform to the influence attempt. Firing, suspending, ridiculing, demoting, or reprimanding a subordinate are common ways of using coercive power by a supervisor. In other words, coercive power is a function of the perception of subordinates of the extent to which their supervisors can inflict punishment for undesired behavior.

Reward power

Reward power is based on the perception of subordinates that their supervisor can reward them for desired behavior. Supervisors often use pay

raises, promotions, bonuses, or recognition to exert reward power over their subordinates. To be effective, subordinates must value the incentives provided and that the supervisors are able to provide these incentives.

Whereas coercive power is associated with the capacity to inflict punishment for undesirable behavior, reward power is associated with the ability to provide positive inducements for desirable behavior. In other words, reward power can be considered as the flip side of coercive power. Although these are considered two different power bases, one may consider them as two opposite ends of a continuum.

Legitimate power

This power is possibly the most complex of those presented here. It is based on the internalized values of subordinates which dictate that the supervisor has the right to prescribe and control their behavior and they have the obligation to accept the influence. The power is vested in the rights, duties, and responsibilities of the position, not the person who holds position.

moral right

Expert power

Expert power is based on the subordinates' belief that their supervisor has adequate professional experience, training, special expertise, and access to knowledge. Accountants, marketing researchers, IT specialists, and engineers may exert significant influence on their subordinates because of their specialized skills.

Referent power

Referent power is based on the desire of subordinates to identify and associate with their supervisor. Identification is the feeling of oneness of a subordinate with their supervisor. Here the control is dependent upon the supervisor's charisma or personal magnetism to attract subordinates to them so that they follow their leadership.

Information power

Raven (1965) expanded the original five-category French and Raven taxonomy by adding another power base: *informational power*. This is

associated with one's access to information which is not public knowledge, but which is needed by employees to perform their job adequately. For example, a secretary to a senior executive may have this power. He or she may have access to the information and ability to control the flow of information to and from the senior executive.

Position and personal power bases

Coercive, reward, legitimate, and information power bases are associated with the position that a supervisor holds in an organization. These power bases together constitute the position power of an organization member. The remaining two power bases are associated with a person not a position incumbent. Individuals acquire these power bases through their own effort and together they are called personal power. Rahim (1988) and Yukl and Falbe (1991) provided evidence of factorial independence of the position and personal power bases.

Extension of French and Raven power bases

Raven (1992, 1993) revised and expanded the original taxonomy of power bases and created a power–interaction model of interpersonal influence. This model includes two forms of each of the five original power bases and an informational power base. Raven et al. (1998) designed a forty-four-item instrument (Interpersonal Power Inventory) to measure these eleven power bases. A factor analysis of the mean scores of the eleven power bases resulted in two factors: "harsh" or "strong" bases (personal coercive, impersonal reward, legitimate reciprocity, personal reward, impersonal coercive, legitimate equity) and "soft" or "weak" bases (expert, referent, informational, legitimate dependence, legitimate position).

Further descriptions of these power bases are provided by Raven (1993) and Raven and his colleagues (Erchul et al. 2004; Erchul et al. 2001). Although studies generally conclude that a soft power base is more effective in inducing compliance among subordinates than a harsh power base, a study by Schwarzwald et al. (2001) with police officers who worked with transformational captains reported greater willingness to comply with both harsh and soft power bases than their colleagues who worked with low transformational captains.

Other power bases

Other power bases have been suggested by scholars from time to time, but these conceptualizations did not gain prominence in theory and research. These are as follows:

1. **Affiliation or connection power.** Leaders acquire this power from their association with influential individuals inside or outside the organization. In other words, it is associated with the attributes of the individuals with whom the leader is connected and is probably a source of referent power (Bielous 1995; Benfari et al. 1986).
2. **Credibility power.** This source of power is associated with one's integrity, character, and truthfulness. Employees are more likely to be persuaded by a supervisor with high credibility than a supervisor with little or no credibility. Nesler et al. (1993) suggested and provided evidence for considering credibility as an additional source of power.
3. **Ecological power.** Yukl (2006) suggests another source of power which is associated with control over work design, technology, and physical work environment. This provides an ability to exert indirect influence on employees.
4. **Persuasiveness power.** This is another variation of referent power and is associated with persuasion skills or one's ability to reason effectively (i.e. rational problem solving skills) with others (Yukl and Van Fleet 1992).
5. **Prestige power.** Probably this is another variation of referent power and is associated with the status, esteem, or personal reputation of leaders in organizations (Finkelstein 1992).

Measurement

The development and refinement of the theory of supervisory power has been plagued by measurement and analytic shortcomings. A number of early studies used single-item measures to rank the importance of French–Raven power bases as reasons for compliance with supervisor's wishes (Bachman et al. 1966; Student 1968). These measures had inadequate psychometric properties and, as a result, findings from these studies are questionable (Podsakoff and Schriesheim 1985).

Raven et al. (1998) designed a forty-four-item instrument to measure their expanded eleven-category power bases. After dropping one item

from each power category as "some of the items did not hang together" the authors factor-analyzed the means of the eleven indexes of power bases which resulted in two factors: hard and soft power bases. It is not clear why the authors did not use standard practice for instrument development which would involve factor analysis of the forty-four items.

Several measures of power bases are now available with reported psychometric properties and may be used in future studies (Frost and Stahelski 1988; Hinkin and Schriesheim 1989; Pearce and Robinson 1987; Rahim 1988; Yukl and Falbe 1991). Rahim and Magner's study (1996) with three US (n = 1,474) and two Bangladesh and South Korean (n = 978) samples provided support for the convergent and discriminant validities for the Rahim Leader Power Inventory (Rahim 1988) and the invariance of factor pattern and factor loadings across four organizational levels. This and other studies (Hess and Wagner 1999; Lam 1997) support the construct validity of the instrument. Further studies are needed to gain better understanding of the psychometric properties of the remaining instruments. Data from cross-cultural studies will be of great value.

Yukl (2006: 160) suggests that the findings from the power studies "may be biased due to attributions, social desirability, and stereotypes." However, these problems are not unique to the studies on power as any survey instrument will have some of these shortcomings. In any field study on power, attempts should be made to control these biases. Three instruments designed by Hinkin and Schriesheim, Rahim, and Yukl and Falbe discussed in the preceding paragraph have strong psychometric properties and can be used in future studies.

Interdependence among power bases

The bases of leader power are interdependent and are often used in combination. For example, giving a reward by a supervisor may be attributed to his or her referent power. Raven (1992; see also Yukl 2006) rightly suggested the need for studying how certain power bases influence the existence and use of the remaining power bases. Greene and Podsakoff's field experiment (1981) indicates that a change in the perception of reward power base may affect the perception of coercive, legitimate, and referent power bases but not expert power base. These interrelationships should be explained so that practitioners can acquire

and use appropriate power bases to improve their subordinates' job performance and satisfaction. Knowing how power bases influence each other is important as each power base may influence outcomes, not only directly but also through the mediation of its effects on other sources of power (Gaski 1986: 63). It is possible that the position power base influences criterion variables through the mediation of the personal power base. Stated in another way, the position power base influences the personal power base, which, in turn, influences criterion variables. Support for this relationship can be found from Gaski's study of channels of distribution (1986) which reported positive relationships of reward to expert and referent power bases. Similar relationships were reported by Carson et al. (1993), Rahim and Psenicka (1996), and Munduate and Dorado (1998). The studies by Carson et al. and Rahim and Psenicka found positive relationships of legitimate power base to expert and referent power bases. This makes sense, as supervisors who use their legitimate power base may be perceived by their subordinates as competent as well as friendly, considerate, and fair.

Previous studies found that the expert and referent power bases were significantly correlated. Carson et al.'s meta-analysis of the power bases and outcomes (1993), Munduate and Dorado's study with seventy-eight Spanish subjects (1998), and Rahim and Psenicka's study (1996) with 578 employees found positive relationship of expert to referent power base. One possible explanation of this is that subordinates like to identify and associate with a supervisor who possesses expert power. Furthermore, these studies reported that the reverse influence (i.e. referent power influencing expert power) is unlikely to happen. This is very similar to the influence of expert power on the interpersonal attraction of subordinates (Aguinis et al. 1996). In other words, the perception of expert power positively influences the perception of referent power.

Mediating effects of power bases

Several studies indicate that coercive power is generally ineffective in influencing individual outcomes (Podsakoff et al. 1982; Rahim 1989). Studies by Munduate and Dorado (1998) and Rahim and Psenicka (1996), which used structural equations models, indicate that coercive power negatively influences individual outcomes, such as workgroup commitment through the mediation of the expert and referent power bases.

Mossholder et al. (1998) conducted a field study that investigated the mediating effects of procedural justice on the relationships of power bases to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The study reported consistent mediation effects of justice on the relationships of the coercive, expert, and referent power bases to satisfaction and commitment. Putting it in another way, coercive, expert, and referent power bases influence procedural justice, which in turn, influences the criterion variables. The mediating effects of justice associated with reward and legitimate power bases were not significant.

Correlates of power bases

Oyster (1992) conducted an interesting study on women executives' perception of the power bases used by "best" and "worst" bosses. Results show that male bosses were more likely than female bosses to be identified as the worst bosses, but females and males were equally likely to be identified as the best bosses. The best bosses used more reward, informational, expert, and referent and less coercive and legitimate power bases than the worst bosses. The following review shows that reward, expert, and referent power bases which are used more by the best bosses than worst bosses are better predictors of criterion variables.

Compliance

Ideally, a criterion variable for a study on power would be one that most directly linked to the outcome of power use. The most appropriate criterion measure to use, then, would be some measure of followers' compliance with leaders' influence attempts. Early studies on French and Raven's power typology frequently touched upon subordinates' compliance with supervisors' wishes and effectiveness in relation to the supervisors' particular power bases (Bachman 1968; Bachman et al. 1968; Bachman et al. 1966; Ivancevich 1970; Student 1968). The consensus among these studies was that subordinates perceive a coercive power base as a weak reason for compliance with supervisors' wishes. Reward and legitimate power bases were considered important by the subordinates but they showed no clear relationship with compliance. Expert power base and, in most cases, referent power base consistently correlated with compliance. This lack of consistent relationships

between power bases and compliance may be partly attributed to the measurement and sampling deficiencies discussed before.

Studies by Dunne et al. (1978) and Thamhain and Gemmill (1974) indicated that expertise, professional challenge, and formal authority were important reasons for compliance with the requests of project managers. These studies strongly suggested that legitimate power was effective in inducing compliance. In a major study, Warren (1968) found that the use of five types of power by principals was positively associated with total conformity (behavioral and attitudinal) of teachers. The rank-order correlation between referent power and conformity was the highest. Rahim and Afza's study (1993) with 308 US accountants showed that the expert and referent power bases were positively associated with attitudinal compliance, but legitimate and referent power bases were positively associated with behavioral compliance. This study also shows that the expert and referent power bases were negatively associated with propensity to leave a job.

A study by Rahim et al. (1994) with 459 managers in the US and 625 managers in South Korea found that the legitimate, expert, and referent power bases were positively associated with compliance in the US In South Korea, legitimate, referent, and reward power bases were associated with compliance. It is not clear why expert power base was not associated with compliance. One can speculate why reward power is associated with compliance in South Korea and not the US In a collectivistic culture like South Korea, the reward allocation rule is more likely to follow the equality norm rather than the equity norm (Kim et al. 1990). Since rewards are allocated to group members more or less equally under the equality norm, a supervisor's reward power base in a dyadic relation may be seen as a potential source of an incremental influence for gaining compliance and satisfaction with supervision. However, this is speculative and can only be validated by further comparative research on the power bases.

Satisfaction with work and supervision

Satisfaction with work and supervision are important criterion variables for the study of power. This is because one of the principal reasons for the possession and/or use of power is to keep the subordinates satisfied.

personal power (handwritten margin note)

A study by Busch (1980) indicated that expert and referent power bases were positively related to satisfaction with supervision of employees. Coercive power base was negatively but not consistently related to their satisfaction with supervision. Reward and legitimate power bases were not consistently related to satisfaction with supervision. This study used a modified version of the single-item instrument designed by Student (1968). Earlier studies on the power bases and satisfaction with work found similar relationships (Bachman 1968; Bachman et al. 1966; Bachman et al. 1968; Burke and Wilcox 1971). Low reliabilities of the power instruments used in the above studies may have attenuated relationships between the power bases and satisfaction with work and supervision.

Studies on leadership by Sims and Szilagyi (1975), Keller and Szilagyi (1976), and Podsakoff et al. (1982) found that performance-contingent reward behavior of the leader was positively correlated with satisfaction with supervision. But the performance-contingent punishment behavior of the leader had no effects on the satisfaction with supervision. Rahim and Afza's (1993) study showed that referent power base was positively associated with satisfaction with supervision among accountants. Another study with 476 managers in the US shows that legitimate power was negatively and expert and referent power bases were positively associated with satisfaction with supervision (Rahim 1989).

A study by Rahim et al. (1994) reported that legitimate power was negatively associated with satisfaction with supervision in the USA and South Korea. Referent power base in the USA and reward, expert, and referent power bases in South Korea were positively associated with satisfaction with supervision.

Organizational commitment

There is great interest among scholars to investigate employee commitment because it is generally viewed as a positive factor for both individuals and organizations. Rahim and Afza's study (1993) showed that referent and expert power bases were positively associated with organizational commitment.

A field study in Bangladesh shows that legitimate and expert power bases were positively associated with organizational commitment (Rahim et al. 1994). A study by Rahim and Psenicka (1996) reported that overall position power base (coercive, reward, and legitimate)

influences personal power base (expert and referent); expert power, in turn, positively influences referent power; referent power, in turn, positively influences workgroup commitment. Finally, commitment negatively influences workgroup conflict.

Another study showed that conflict management strategies mediated the relationship between power bases and organizational commitment in the US and Greece (Rahim et al. 2003). The study showed that referent power is more effective than other power bases in influencing criterion variable. Without the qualities associated with referent power, other power bases may not be very effective in changing the behavior of subordinates.

Styles of handling conflict

After reviewing numerous studies, Raven and Kruglanski (1970) concluded that the analysis of power provided a fruitful basis for understanding interpersonal conflict. There is need for investigating how managers' power bases affect their subordinates' conflict management so that supervisors can change or maintain their power bases to achieve optimum results.

A field study with a collegiate sample of 301 management students shows that reward power base was positively associated with integrating (collaborating) and negatively associated with avoiding styles of handling conflict with supervisor (Rahim and Buntzman 1989). Legitimate power was positively associated with dominating (competing) style; expert power was positively associated with integrating and dominating styles, but negatively associated with avoiding style; and referent power was positively associated with integrating, obliging, and compromising styles and negatively associated with dominating style. Another study in the USA, Greece, South Korea, and Bangladesh, which used structural equations models, shows the following:

1. Coercive power was negatively associated with expert power in the US
2. Reward power was positively associated with expert power in all the four countries and it was positively associated with referent power in Greece and Bangladesh.
3. Legitimate power was positively associated with expert power in all the four countries, but it was positively associated with referent power in the USA

4. In all the four countries, expert power was positively associated with referent power, referent power was positively associated with problem-solving approach to conflict management and negatively associated with bargaining approach to conflict management.
5. In the US and Greece, problem-solving strategy was positively and bargaining strategy was negatively associated with propensity to leave a job.

(Rahim and Psenicka 2004)

The lack of relationships between conflict-management strategies and propensity to leave a job in the two collectivistic countries (South Korea and Bangladesh) probably indicates that employees in these countries do not have adequate opportunities to move from one job to another. Results other than these did not differ systematically that could be attributed to the individualism–collectivism dimension of the national culture.

Job performance

A field study in Bangladesh reported that coercive power was negatively associated with the effectiveness (performance, conformance, dependability, and personal adjustment) of employees and expert power was positively associated with the same criterion variable (Rahim et al. 1994). Another study in Bulgaria shows that referent power base was positively associated with effectiveness (Rahim et al. 2000).

A recent study that performed data analysis with LISREL in 398 groups simultaneously examined the relationships of subordinates' perception of the bases of supervisory power to each other and to their own conflict management styles with supervisors, which, in turn, influenced supervisory rating of job performance (Rahim et al. 2001). Employees ($N = 1,116$) completed questionnaires on power and conflict styles, and their job performance was evaluated by their respective supervisors ($N = 398$). Overall, the model suggests that coercive power negatively influenced and reward and legitimate powers positively influenced expert power base, but only legitimate power positively influenced referent power base. Expert power positively influenced referent power which, in turn, positively influenced problem-solving style and negatively influenced bargaining style. The problem-solving style positively influenced job performance, but the bargaining style did not have significant influence on performance.

Discussion

In sum, the literature review suggests that personal power base (expert and referent powers) is associated with effective leadership. Also, effective leaders use performance-contingent reward power to increase job satisfaction and performance of subordinates. They use somewhat legitimate and performance-contingent coercive power bases depending on situations.

As discussed in the interdependence among power bases section, an alternative explanation of the weak relationship between position power and criterion variables is that position power base may influence criterion variables through the mediation of personal power base. Consistent with this review, a model of power bases and subordinates' performance and satisfaction (presented in Figure 13.1) is suggested which can be tested in future studies.

Figure 13.1 shows that coercive, reward, and legitimate power bases influence expert and referent power bases; expert power base influences referent power base, which in turn, influences outcomes. In future studies, other power bases reviewed in this chapter (personal power: affiliation, credibility, persuasiveness, prestige; position power: informational, ecological) may be included in this model. Also other criterion variables, such as motivation, creative behavior, and organizational citizenship behavior may be included in this model.
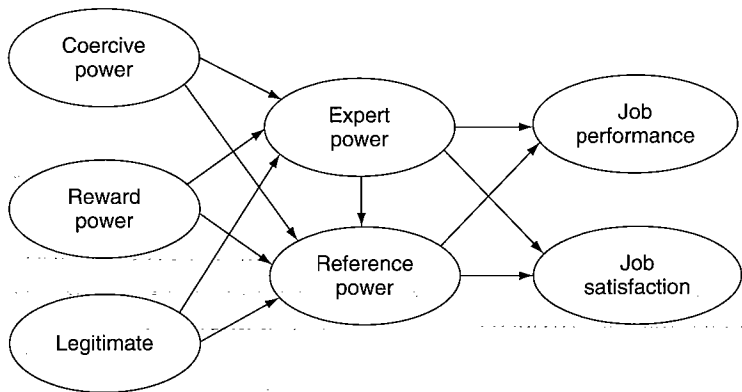

Figure 13.1 A model of bases of leader power and employee performance and satisfaction.

How to acquire, maintain, and use power bases effectively

The studies reviewed in this chapter show that power is very important for leadership effectiveness. Therefore, it is appropriate to discuss what leaders can do to acquire and maintain the right types of power bases and learn how to use them to attain goals. Leaders will become more effective in enhancing positive outcomes and reducing dysfunctional outcomes of subordinates by enhancing their own personal (expert and referent power bases) and position power bases (legitimate and performance-contingent reward power bases). Subordinates' perception of their supervisors' use of these four power bases may have compound positive impact on the subordinates' job performance, satisfaction, and other outcomes.

Personal power base

The challenge of the contemporary organizations is to enhance managers' personal power base. In order to obtain desired results, there should be changes at the individual and organizational levels.

Expert power

Improving managers' expert power would involve basic education and specific job-related training. Education and training should include, among others, familiarity with the organization's culture and on-the-job training to build on this power base. Managers should also be encouraged to enhance their skills through continuous self-learning. They will also need appropriate job experience to build on this power base.

Referent power

Studies reviewed in this chapter show that referent power base is more effective than other power bases in influencing criterion variables. Although this power base has the most potential, it is probably used the least (Benfari et al. 1986). Supervisors who are deficient on this power base may be provided human-relations training so that they learn to be empathetic to the subordinates' needs and feelings, treat them with dignity and ethically, and present their interests to higher-level managers when there is a need to do so. This should enhance a supervisor's base of referent power.

Intervention at organizational level

Organizations should provide appropriate reinforcements for learning and improving their referent and expert power bases. Education and training may be of limited value when it comes to improving referent power base. Organizations may have to adapt the policy of recruiting managers with vision and charisma who are likely to bring an adequate referent power base.

Position power

Training should help managers learn how to use position power base to deal with certain social situations.

Coercive power

Managers may be provided human-relations training so that they use only performance-contingent coercive power to deal with appropriate situations. Whereas in an individualistic culture coercive power base does not have any impact on subordinate outcomes, in a collectivistic culture the acquisition of coercive power can have a negative impact on outcomes.

Reward power

Supervisors may be encouraged to provide various kinds of performance-contingent rewards by granting them the power they need to reward subordinates for their contributions to the organization. Subordinates are more likely to follow a leader's instructions if he or she provides rewards to subordinates contingent upon performance and does not punish them for nonperformance. Although this recommendation is useful for the managers in the individualistic cultures, this is particularly appropriate for the collectivistic cultures.

Legitimate power

Subordinates are more likely to follow a leader's instructions if he or she provides instructions unambiguously, makes sure that instructions are reasonable and appropriate, explains reasons for the instructions, and follows channel of command. Training can help supervisors to follow policies and procedures consistently and to provide instructions, guidance, and advice clearly. There is a "zone of indifference" within which the subordinates will accept directives (Zelditch and Walker 1984). This power is ineffective outside this zone. In other words,

subordinates may not carry out directives adequately if they believe the directives are unreasonable or unjustified.

Directions for future research

The model suggested in this chapter may be tested to enhance our understanding of the effectiveness of power bases. An important area of future research concerns carefully designing and evaluating the effects of intervention on supervisory power bases in enhancing subordinates' job performance and satisfaction. Field experiments are particularly useful in evaluating the effects of enhancing the personal power base of supervisors on individual and organizational outcomes. There is also need for scenario-based and laboratory studies that control some of the extraneous variables to better understand the effects of leader power reported in the present study.

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