



The Exercise of Social Power and the Effect of Ethnicity: Evidence from Malaysian's Industrial Companies

Kim Lian Lee (Corresponding author)

Faculty of Management & Information Technology, University College Sedaya International

3, Jalan Jenaris 2/1, Taman Jenaris 2, Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia

E-mail: kllee@ucsi.edu.my

Guan Tui Low

E-mail: drgtlow@gmail.com

Abstract

The writers investigated the managerial power bases on work autonomy and supervisory satisfaction in Malaysian industrial environment. The effect of ethnicity was also explored. Data from 210 respondents from technical and non-technical staff of manufacturing companies indicated that supervision of industrial people were most acceptable through the practice of referent, expert and reward power. Among the power bases, reward power was most often exercised when high work autonomy was accorded. The work autonomy was found to be positively correlated with the satisfaction with supervision. Along the racial line, the Malays rated their superior more positively on the referent power base than Chinese, while the Chinese rated their superior as more coercive than did the Malays

Keywords: Management, Organizational Behavior, Power Bases, Work Autonomy, Satisfaction, Managerial Supervision, Ethnicity

1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of power relationships upon subordinates' work autonomy and satisfaction with supervision. The central constructs whose relationships we will be explore in this research are power, work autonomy and satisfaction with supervision. Power is said to be a "part of the larger study of the determinant of human behaviour" (Cartwright, 1965, p.3). The organizational power relationships include top management, middle level managers and support staff. The main issue is then the interpersonal relationships that occur across organizational level as termed as "superior-subordinate dyadic relationships". In today's organizations, managers need to be aware of the sources of power in work situations and how they affect employees' satisfaction since dissatisfied subordinates could lead to poor work performance, absenteeism or high turnover (Churchill, Ford & Walker, 1976; Rahim & Buntzman, 1989).

Besides that, work autonomy as a variable for organizational study has been well-known as antecedents or consequences of power. Spector's (1986) reviewed more than 40 studies point out that work autonomy to be strongly related to staff turnover, absent from work, performance, motivation, physical ailments, emotional distress and dissatisfaction.

Moreover, most of the research attention was in the context of job design or job characteristics and less attention has been given in linking the types of power applications and work autonomy. Knowing how power affects work autonomy and satisfaction will allow superiors to change or maintain their power bases to achieve desirable outcomes.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The fundamental of this study is lie on the interaction of key variables as shown in Figure 1 (Note 1). The study also analyzed the effect of ethnicity on power bases, work autonomy and satisfaction. Another objective of this study is to compare the consequences of social power relationship in this Malaysian work setting with those reported happening in the West. In this region, the educational level specialized work experience, and expertise of superiors are often more limited than those in the developed countries. The culture is characterised by strong traditional values according to which deep commitment to friends, superiors and relatives is the locus of social relations among individuals. These cultural and environmental factors are likely to influence the outcomes of the different bases of superior power and also in the manner in which other contingent factors affect the acquisition and use of these powers.

The main instruments used in this study were developed and had undergone rigorous validation processes and proven to have superior psychometric integrity than instruments used in many earlier research. Thus, the present study is also aimed at providing research results from which the results of the earlier research may be compared and their general applicability assessed.

2. Literature Review

The classic formulation of power, authority and legitimacy appeared in the work of Weber (1947) who analyzed power according to the way in which it was legitimized among followers: by appeal to rationality, by tradition, or by the transcendent claims of charisma. This work however presented the typology rather than an organized theory of power. The notable development of the concept of power began with the work of Lasswell and Kaplan (1950) who considered both the base and goal of influence in order to generate 64 different forms of the influence process or power. Two main streams of thought have emerged from there. One is based on political science and game theory: it includes most notably, articles by Dahl (1957), Harsanyi (1962) and Kornberg and Perry (1966). The second centres on social psychology and is represented by French and Raven (1959), Cartwright (1965), Thibaut and Kelly (1959), and Emerson (1962).

Many power theoreticians (Dahl 1957; Emerson, 1962; Kornberg & Perry, 1966; Nagel, 1968; Wrong, 1968) stressed that power should be conceptualized as a relationship between or among persons and not an attribute or possession of a person or group. Within organizational context, theorists largely agree that individual power in organization is the ability to control others, to exercise discretion, to get one's own way.

2.1 The Bases of Power

Numerous categorizations have been used in differentiating bases of social power in organizations (Peabody, 1961; Etzioni 1964; Patchen, 1974; Twomey, 1978; Kipnis, Schmidt & Wilkinson, 1980; Shukla, 1982; Rahim, 1989). However, French and Raven (1959) typology of power is still the most popularly used in research work (Cobb, 1980; Frost & Stahelski, 1988; Rahim, 1989; Rahim, Antonioni, Krumov, & Illieva, 2000). French and Raven defined bases of power as below:

2.1.1 Coercive Power

Coercive power involves the concept of influence based upon "the expectation of punishment for failure to conform to an influence attempt". The strength of coercive power depends on the magnitude of the "negative valence of the threatened punishment multiplied by the perceived probability that a power recipient can avoid the punishment by conformity". One of the key elements is that people subject to coercive power are either indifferent to, or opposed to, the wielder of authority.

2.1.2 Expert Power

This power usually manifests in information, knowledge and wisdom, in good decision, in sound judgment and in accurate perception of reality. Expert power is restricted to particular areas as the "expert" tends to be specialised. The extent of expert power is not clearly a function of the face-to-face interaction or the personal quality of that interaction between role partners; it may be a function of the knowledge possessed by the power wielder, not of his presence.

2.1.3 Reward Power

Reward power is derived from the ability to facilitate the attainment of desired outcomes by others. In a sense, this form of social power is closely related to coercive power. If one conforms to gain acceptance, reward power is a work. However, if conformity takes place to forestall rejection, coercive power has to be exercised. In accordance to French and Raven, reward power depends on the power wielder (individual or group) administering "positive valences and reducing or removing negative valences".

2.1.4 Referent Power

This involves the concept of "identification", which French and Raven (1959) define as "a feeling of oneness or a desire for such an identity". If referring to a group, then an individual seeks membership in such group or has a desire to remain in an association already established.

2.1.5 Legitimate Power

Closely tied to the Weberian concept of "legitimate authority", legitimate power is induced by norms or values of a group that individuals accept by virtue of their socialisation in the group. By the French-Raven, definition, this power "stems from internalised values which dictate that there is a legitimate right to influence and an obligation to accept this influence".

2.2 Work Autonomy

The type of power used to exercise control will impact upon the type of involvement on the part of the controlled subordinates. One variable that is likely to be affected by the variation in the exercise of self-control of the subordinates is work autonomy. Breugh (1985) described work autonomy facets as follows:

(1) Work Method Autonomy

The degree of discretion/choice individuals have regarding the procedures/methods they utilise in going about their work.

(2) Work Scheduling Autonomy

The extent to which workers feel they can control the scheduling/sequencing/timing of their work activities.

(3) Work Criteria Autonomy

The degree to which workers have the ability to modify or choose the criteria used for evaluating their performance.

It should be emphasized that the essence of these definitions lies on employee's perceptions as regardless of the amount of autonomy subordinate really has in their work, it is how much they perceive that they have which affects their reactions to the job. Autonomy has received considerable attention in the context of job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Sims, Szilagyi, & Keller, 1976). Loher, Noe, Moeller, and Fitzgerald (1985) have meta-analyse the relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction, and found autonomy to be highly related to job satisfaction than any of the other job characteristics. Based on the above mentioned findings, it is anticipated that in the present study, job autonomy as one consequence of the various types of power applications should co-vary with satisfaction with supervision.

2.3 Satisfaction with Supervision

Job satisfaction is a collection of feelings or affective responses of the organizational members which are associated with the job situation within the organization. Smith, Kendal and Hulin (1969), in their well documented measure, the Cornell JDI (Cornell Job Descriptive Index) described five areas of satisfaction: the work itself, the supervision, the co-workers, the pay, and the opportunities for promotion on the job. Since the present study is on the superior-subordinate relationships, the job-facet satisfaction is most relevant to satisfaction with supervision.

Obviously, from human relations perspectives, supervisory satisfaction is related to the personality traits of the superior which as his/her temperament, openness, industriousness, pleasantness etc. The positive side of all of these traits can enhance satisfaction. Related to the personal resourcefulness, supervisory satisfaction is also dependent on the superior's distinguishing qualities and abilities such as intelligence and knowledge.

2.4 Ethnicity

In the multi racial society like Malaysia, employees bring into the organisation differing systems of values. The heterogeneous value profiles may transcend into different beliefs and attitudes which determine expressive and perceptual responses toward organisational systems and work. For example, the work of Ismail (1988) advanced the notion that Malay managers are different from their Chinese counterparts in their view toward leadership style and job freedom. Differences in the perception of power bases, work autonomy and satisfaction with supervision along the racial line will be investigated in the present study.

3. Hypotheses to be tested

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study.

- H1a: Superiors' expert, referent, reward and legitimate are positively associated with the subordinates' satisfaction with supervision
- H1b: Superiors' coercive base of social power is negatively associated with the subordinates' satisfaction with supervision.
- H2: Subordinates' work autonomy is significantly and positively related to the development of reward and referent bases of social power in the relationship with superiors.
- H3: Work autonomy is significantly and positively related to the satisfaction with supervision.
- H4: There are no differences between Malay and Chinese subordinates' perceptions of power bases, work autonomy and satisfaction with supervision

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Sampling Design

The sample for this study comprises of the technical and non-technical staff in the manufacturing companies. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select companies with a number of employees more than 25. This

number was arbitrarily chosen but the intention here was to include only establishments where a more formal organizational structure and system of supervision more likely to exist and function.

The factories that met the above criteria were selected from the registry of members of the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers.

4.2 Research Instruments

All data used in the study consist of responses to questionnaire items. Measures of relevant constructs were discussed here.

4.2.1 Bases of Supervisory Power

The five French-Raven bases of supervisory power were measured by using the Rahim Leader Power Inventory (RLPI) (Rahim, 1988). This multi-item instrument uses a 5-point Likert scale to measure perceptions of subordinates regarding their superiors' bases of power. The instrument comprises of 29 items.

4.2.2 Work Autonomy

Work autonomy was conducted using the instrument developed by Breugh (1985, 1989) and Breugh and Becker (1987). The instrument is capable of measuring three facets: method, scheduling, and criteria of work autonomy, comprises of 9 items.

4.2.3 Satisfaction with Supervision

The instrument used to measure satisfaction with supervision is the updated version of the original Job Descriptive Index (JDI; Smith et al., 1969) which was later revised by Roznowski (1989). The instrument is made up of 18 items.

4.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Reliability and factor analysis was used to check the consistency and dimensionality of the scale items. Multiple regression analysis is performed to check the criterion-related validity of the scale items. Pearson Intercorrelation was used to measure the associations among the social power bases, work autonomy and satisfaction with supervision. Paired T-Test was conducted to contrast the Malay-Chinese on the perception of power bases, work autonomy and satisfaction with supervision.

5. Research Results and Discussions

5.1 Sample Characteristics

Data from 230 respondents were received and only 210 data were usable. By ethnic group, 72% of the respondents were Chinese, 18% were Malay, and 8% were Indian, while other races made up the rest. Attempts to obtain more female respondent to test male-female differences were not successful due to the much smaller proportion of female taking supervisory roles in the factories. A mere 7% female respondent reflects the male domination in the industrial sector.

More than 60% of the respondents were from factories located in the state of Selangor where factories were largely concentrated in the Klang Valley. Other states like Perak, Penang, Kedah and Perlis account for only 20% of the total respondents. The remaining respondents were from factories scattered in the states of Johore, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca and Pahang.

In terms of age, the highest proportion of respondents fell into the 31-40 years age group. They accounted for 50% of the total number of respondents. This was followed by the 20-30 years age group (34%), while those above 41 years old accounted for the remaining.

On the whole, the education level of the respondents was high. Nearly 61% of the respondents had education up to university in technical field while 15% received university education in non-technical field. Only 24% of the respondents had no tertiary education. The high educational level was reflected in the position or the type of occupation held by the majority of the respondents i.e. 5 Assistant General Managers, 54 Divisional Manager and Assistants, 74 Engineers and Assistants, 11 Chemists, 32 Supervisors, 12 Plant Operators and the rest comprised of System Analysts, Draughtsmen, Quality Control Inspectors etc.

The average salary of the respondents was higher than the population's average. The survey data showed that 29% of the respondents earned more than RM5000 per month, 12% earned RM4001 to RM5000 per month, 16% earned RM3001 to RM4000 per month, and 13% earned RM2001 to RM3000 per month.

On average, the respondents had worked in the present company for 7 years. It was noted that 22% of the total respondents had worked for one year or less in the present company, 23% had worked between 2 to 4 years, 21% had worked between 5 to 8 years, and 17% had worked between 8 and 12 years, while only 12% of the respondents had worked longer than 12 years in the present company.

In terms of the organizational size, the survey had selected sample which represents the medium to large sized

Malaysian manufacturing companies. The average number of employees of the factory sample as 275. It was found that 41% of the factories had 25 to 100 employees, 24% had 101 to 200 employees, 14% had 201 to 400 employees, 10% had 401 to 1000 employees and 11% had more than 1000 employees.

Classifying the factories according to the type of business revealed that a greater portion of the factories manufactured machinery (29%), followed by food (13%), chemical (13%) and the rest manufactured non-metal, basic metal, textile, wood and paper.

The survey also revealed the information about the respondent's superiors. Almost all of the superiors reported in the survey were males with the exception of one female. A majority of them were holding medium to high management positions. Racial composition of the superiors was: 76% Chinese, 7% Malay, 7% Indian and 10% from other races. On average, the superiors had worked in the organization for 11 years – far longer than the subordinates' average. Only 9% had worked for less than a year, 16% had worked between 1 and 5 years, 34% had worked between 6 and 10 years, 15% had worked between 11 to 15 years, 15% had worked between 16 to 20 years and the remaining 11% had worked more than 20 years in the present company. Most of the superiors were holding high positions in the company with 36% of them in the first hierarchical level, 31% in the second level, and 24% in the third level, while only a fraction of them were in the lower management positions. Their educational level was also strikingly high, with 70% of them having had tertiary education in technical field and 12% having had tertiary education in non-technical field. Only 18% had up to either primary or secondary education. By designation, 40 of the superiors were the Directors of companies, 32 were the General Manager, 89 were the Divisional Managers and the rest consisted of Assistant Manager, Engineers, Supervisors etc.

5.2 Validating the Scales

The data on the 29 power items from the sample of 210 respondents were factor-analyzed. The selection of a factor and an item was guided by the criteria: eigenvalue > 1.0 and Scree Plot and factor loading > 0.4, respectively (Ford, MacCallum & Tait, 1986). Based on these criteria, the first five factors were selected (result not shown).

Considering that the result as a whole supported the a priori grouping of items, it can be concluded that the power scale developed by Rahim (1988) was suitable for application to the present data although some purification was necessary to improve its accuracy. The indices of the five power bases were computed by averaging the samples responses to the items in each factor. This resulted in the creation of five continuous subscales.

The mean, standard deviation and standardized Cronbach Alpha and the corrected item-total correlation for each subscale is provided in Table 1 (Note 2). The internal consistency reliability coefficients for all the scales were satisfactory (Nunnally, 1978). All the scales had coefficient Cronbach Alpha greater than .70. A corrected item-total correlation is a correlation between an item's score and subscale score computed from the remaining items in the set. The item-total correlations for the five scales ranged between .29 and .76.

A multiple regression analysis was run to test the relationship between the five bases of leader power and the subordinates' satisfaction with supervision. The results are presented in Table 2 (Note 3). The results showed that the referent, expert, and reward power bases positively influenced satisfaction with supervision. The five power bases together explained about 45% of the variance in satisfaction. The relations between the five power bases and the "theoretically-related" dependent variable supported the criterion related validity of the power scale.

5.3 Testing of Hypotheses

H1a & H1b: Power Bases and Supervisory Satisfaction

The correlational results in Table 3 (Note 4) provided good support for H1a. The non-coercive bases of social power (expert, referent, reward and legitimate) showed positive relationships with satisfaction with supervision. Referent power ranked highest among other power exercises (coefficient .64). This was followed by expert power and reward power which both had coefficients of correlation of 0.47. The ranking of intercorrelation was somewhat similar to the study of Rahim and Buntzman (1989) conducted on respondents with post graduate working experiences. It was expected that referent and expert power represent a high level of internalisation or inner acceptance. In the exercise of referent power, internalisation derived from the identification of power recipient with the wielder of referent power – a personalised commitment to the group or its representative. As Raven (1974) found out, the exercise of referent power tends to encourage a more satisfied, cooperative and prolonged relationships between superiors and subordinates.

Expert power benefits from an umbrella of authority which may go beyond superiors' specialised skills. Among technical staff, expertise emerges as a very important cue for acceptance and recognition of the superiors' direction as reflected in the present result. It most likely gains their compliance and least likely to provoke their resistance (Podsakoff & Schriesheim, 1985). Similarly, greater satisfaction with supervision among subordinates may lead to greater cooperation and heightened dependence.

Both referent and expert power were labelled by Yukl (1981) as "personal" form of power. The present results supported

the general view that “personal” power has a positive effect on the leader-subordinate relationship. The high degree of intercorrelations among the referent, expert and reward power bases served to temper the previous discussions and tended to suggest that while referent power emerged as the dominant explanatory power base, its effective utilisation might be tied, to some extent, to the superiors’ exercise of a combination of other power bases i.e. in this case, expert and reward power bases.

Although earlier findings (Warren, 1968) acknowledged that reward power shows less inner acceptance, the present correlational results indicated a high level of satisfaction with supervision. This power derives from control over positive or rewarding outcomes for subordinates is expected to be an effective means of influence to increase productivity in the organisation. Schopler and Layton (1974) held that the use of reward power is likely to increase the attraction between the manager and subordinates while coercive power is likely to decrease it. Too much emphasis of this power base, however, should be guarded against, since the withdrawal of positive sanctions is apt to result in the subordinates’ reversion to their previous behaviour. Further, the effect of the inducement, even if continued, is subject to diminishing utility.

The legitimate power showed relatively lower correlation with the satisfaction with supervision. In the exercise of legitimate power, subordinates’ responses tended to be dependent on the normative acceptance of the position and prerogatives of the organization at large including its leadership. The present result concurred with the conclusion made by Yukl (1981) that “position” power such as legitimate and coercive are less effective means of influence attempt.

The result for coercive power was not exactly consistent with hypotheses H1b. The study indicated that the amount of coercive power perceived to be held by a superior was not associated with supervisory satisfaction when it was earlier hypothesized to have negative association. However, the result failed to reach statistical significance. Past researchers also had mixed results with regard to this correlation. For example, Rahim and Buntzman (1988) – weak positive; Busch (1980), Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) – negative. The coercive power which is derived from control over negative or punishing outcomes for other does not appear to be a suitable power base for dealing with subordinates. The traditionalists believed that punishment is ineffective and can lead to discontinuation of social interaction. The present results however, neither confirmed nor disproved the effectiveness of punitive treatments to get things done but it was obvious that this power exercise should not lead to subordinates’ satisfaction. Moreover, people could not be coerced into a deep-seated acceptance of organizational requirements.

H2: Power Bases and Work Autonomy

The relationship as appeared in Table 3 (Note 4) between the perceptions of supervisory power bases and the perceived amount of work autonomy given was significantly distinct where in the relationship with all but coercive power had been significance. The relationship was strongest with reward power ($r = .37$) followed by referent ($r = .21$), legitimate ($r = .19$), and expert power ($r = .16$). As autonomy is related to the organizational control - the ability to control over work method, work scheduling and work criteria, a basic premise of the argument that follows is the association of interrelationship between power bases and control. Autonomy provides an opportunity for subordinates to exercise influence on decisions relating to their work. Hence, it enhances their relative ability to control in the organization. The present result pointed to the conclusion that superiors who were perceived to exercise coercive power would tend to exercise greater management control, possibly by application of autocratic techniques. The reason for this was not conclusive. Many plausible explanations were possible, but it was believed that superiors who exercised coercive power held to the traditional view that power has a fixed value, and a function of organizational structure and formal authority, unilateral and vertical in direction. Thus, subordinates’ attempts to exercise greater influence may be seen as a threat to superiors’ control and power. Furthermore, as the power gap between superiors and subordinates will even likely to increase as a direct consequence of punitive treatments, the subordinates tend to prefer to avoid participation. The above explanation is in similar vein as the conclusion made by Gardell (1977) about the relationship between work autonomy and industrial democracy.

The non-coercive power bases correlate better with the work autonomy. Strong relationship between reward power and work autonomy implied that those who exercised control over positive and rewarding outcome accorded greater work autonomy to the subordinates. Though the degree of commitment toward work by the exercise of reward power has been questioned (Warren, 1968; Gemmill & Wilemon, 1972) the rewards at least provide incentives for the subordinates to perform beyond the line of duty. The substantive outcome is visible only when one produces work beyond the normal expectations and control of the superior, otherwise reward is not necessary. The calculative involvement of subordinates to the application of this power underscores the importance of work autonomy in eliciting employees’ responses. This conclusion was drawn from the assumption that people generally prefer greater work autonomy than less and that work autonomy can provide opportunities for greater outcomes. It appeared from this study that individual freedom and autonomy was contingent upon the exercise of reward power. In retrospect, it was inconceivable that reward power was exercised with no allowance for work autonomy in the present context.

The referent power which stems from a feeling on the part of the subordinates identify with the superior indicates

subordinates' agreement with superiors in personal characteristics, decision style, etc. If the desire for work autonomy and the actual work autonomy given is aligned, the perception of referent power is reinforced. The referent power base helps to build trust in a relationship (Busch, 1980). This trust is reciprocal and thus we would expect that those who exercise referent power will accord sufficient work autonomy to their subordinates.

The relationship between legitimate power and autonomy was significant although not strongly correlated ($r = 0.19$). This power is more dependent on the authority relationship (position power) than the individually-based power style. This managerial style were regarded as "traditional" by many management theorists as the superior-subordinate relationship is perceived to follow rigid hierarchical line and employees tend to have little say in the conduct of their work.

It was interesting to note that even though the expert power was highly correlated with satisfaction with supervision, its correlation with work autonomy ($r = 0.16$) was not as pronounced as one would expect. This finding plays down the importance of work autonomy in contributing to the satisfaction with supervision that lead one to think that work autonomy may not be as important as the perception of power style in ensuring employees' satisfaction. It is obvious that professional expertise is not strongly related to work autonomy. Intuitively, if the subordinate perceived that the superior has greater expertise than himself/herself, he/she will tend to down rate his/her own capability at least in comparison with the superior's. Such perception will suppress the motivation for anticipation in decision making, the reciprocal of this might also be true, i.e. if the superior perceive his/her subordinate to be incompetent and lacking in skills, little autonomy will be accorded to them. This finding is consistent with the work of Fiorelli (1988) and Bennett (1982).

Overall, the results agreed with hypothesis H2. However, the present result should be used with caution as the measurement of both construct was not based on the objective measurement but on individual perceptions. Individual differences such as desire for power equalization, inner motivation, etc might intervene in the relationship between power and work autonomy.

H3: Work Autonomy and Supervisory Satisfaction

The relationship between work autonomy and satisfaction with supervision was not as strong as one would expect ($r = .23$). This was probably due to the reason that work autonomy and satisfaction with supervision was not very much a related concept. The former measured job characteristic from the perspectives of internalized pattern of self determination while the latter measured one's feelings about the nature of supervision at work. Nonetheless, an important common element appeared to exist between them that explained their positive and statistically significant relationship. It was assumed that the common element would be the degree or quality of supervision. The right degree of perceived supervision is synonymous with the quality of supervision perceived. Conceptually, satisfaction with supervision may be considered, in special cases, as a consequence of work autonomy, but it is not the action of work autonomy itself. Work autonomy may result in satisfaction or frustration with supervision. Blake and Mouton (1964) suggested that subordinates should be given greater power in decision making if they are exceptionally skilled, the superiors should exercise power in decision making in times of crises or when subordinates lack skills and abilities. The work autonomy is valued to the extent that it is within the capability of the participant. Moreover, satisfaction with supervision has a more general meaning which includes factors other than quality and amount of supervision. It includes personal traits of the superior, his/her knowledge and specialized skills, habits and personal disposition. Thus it can be concluded that all other factors being equal, increased autonomy when accorded within the decision making capabilities of subordinates is accompanied by greater satisfaction with supervision.

H4: Power Bases, Work Autonomy, Supervisory Satisfaction and Ethnicity

The results of contrasting Malay and Chinese (H4) on the perception of the power bases, work autonomy and satisfaction with supervision are shown in Table 4 (Note 5). Other races were deliberately left out of the analysis because they offered a sample size too small for significant results. With exceptions of referent and coercive power bases, the test of no difference held true for all other variables. The results brought forth some interesting findings.

The Malays scored higher in their perception of referent power base implying that in general term the Malay subordinates esteemed and valued their leader more than the Chinese for such esteem and value are highly related to the leader's referent power. In the light of the a priori expectation that Malays are fatalistic, shy ("segan" and "malu") or an easily embarrassed group of people, and Chinese are diligent, aggressive and wealth seeking (Charlesworth, 1974), one would expect the Malay subordinates to be more conformist and more sociocentric than the Chinese. These dominant values would have accentuated the differences in the perception of referent power base. One also need to consider other indirect evidence of referent power that concerns ingratiation and the desire for acceptance by leader which may reciprocate in efficacious responses on the part of the superior leading to a greater perception of referent power. However, firm conclusions cannot be made from these findings alone as interactions with other variables not included in the study are possible.

The Chinese rated their superiors more 'coercive' as compared to the Malays. Since the sample were selected from the basis of similarity in salary (Chi-Square = .44, $p = .99$), age (Chi-Square = .12, $p = .99$), and number of previous jobs (Chi-Square = 2.85, $p = .83$), the differences noted may be attributed to factors external to those considered here. Again, subcultural influences may be one of the reasons behind these differences. The more subtle uses of power to coerce the Malay may also indicate that the Malay subordinates are more conformist and do not require threat and punishment to comply with the superiors' wishes. This is again a presumption as the inherent limitations of the study unable us to distinguish the cause from effect (of the power exercise). Precise explanations of the above findings should await further research works taking into account value systems and ethnicity in the study.

6. Conclusion

In general, the results of this study in relation to the administration of industrial people were quite consistent with our hypotheses based upon other organizational studies involving qualified and professional people. The instruments used in the study were tested and found to be applicable to our work environment. The results provided some tentative, but hopefully useful guidance for industrial administrators.

Intercorrelations among the five power bases showed that French and Raven (1959) power bases are not mutually exclusive. Reward and referent power bases were the most closely related followed by expert and referent power bases. The results revealed that referent power, expert power and to some degree reward power and legitimate power are found to be in association with each form of power. On the other hand, coercive power was the least correlated with all other power bases and most often stands alone. Among all of the power bases, coercive power was most related to reward power. It indicates that reward and coercive power tend to be used interchangeably. Though not considered as a serious disadvantage, notable intercorrelations among the five power bases denote the difficulty of finding power typology which is both exhaustive and conceptually distinct.

In assessing the effectiveness of the various influence attempts, the results suggested that referent, expert and reward power should be emphasized to ensure subordinate acceptance. Coercive power should be minimised in any influence attempt except in situation that call for such approach (e.g. time of crisis, low performance etc). The position of legitimate power was the lowest among the non-coercive power bases in influencing subordinates' behaviour for the case of management of technical and professional staff. Comparative studies revealed an interesting difference in the rank ordering of bases of the superiors' influence attempts. While the present study and Rahim and Buntzman (1989) study ranked referent and expert power as the most favourable and legitimate power the lowest among the non-coercive power bases in eliciting subordinates' acceptance, results of a survey conducted on account executives, office managers and public administrators (Bachman, Smith & Slesinger, 1966) considered legitimate power as the most prominent or second in place. The results suggested a notion that the effectiveness of power influence does relate to the situation and context of the work environment.

The amount of autonomy given by superior was dependent on his/her willingness to delegate decision making down to the subordinate. The manner in which, control over individual's conduct of work lives was found to influence the individual's perception of the source of control. Superior who was perceived to exercise coercive power tends to exercise greater management control – giving little opportunity for the subordinates to be personally responsible for a meaningful portion of their works. The reward power is often used in exchange for compliance by subordinates. The subordinate's performance beyond the line of duty is made possible under high autonomy situations. The referent power tends to build trust in the interpersonal relationship and thus naturally more autonomy will be given by the superior to the subordinates. The perception of referent power is reinforced when one's desire for work autonomy and the actual work autonomy given is aligned. Management style that firmly rests on the legitimacy of authority usually offers inadequate work autonomy as rigid hierarchical structure limits and inhibits the subordinates' freedom in the conduct of their work.

Even though autonomy is said to be highly favoured for job involvement and also aspiration toward increased work participation at both the personal and group level, the present study showed that work autonomy may not result in exceptionally greater satisfaction with supervision. It was concluded that the work autonomy will lead to greater satisfaction with supervision only if the subordinates feel that the degree of work autonomy is appropriate, within the capability of the subordinates and fits that psychological needs of the subordinates. Generally, the results of the study did support the idea that the employees' satisfaction with supervision is favoured by a design of jobs that allow for high autonomy and high demands on skills and cooperation.

Along the racial line, the Malays tended to rate their superiors more positively on referent power than the Chinese while the Chinese rated their superiors as more "coercive" than the Malays. Heterogeneous value profiles of the Malay and Chinese were suspected to have bearings on the perceptions of these power bases. However, there was no noticeable distinction between their perception of superiors' work autonomy and their satisfaction with supervision.

References

- Bachman, J.G., Smith, C.G. & Slesinger, J.A. (1966). Control, performance, and satisfaction: An analysis of structural and individual effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4, 127-136.
- Bennett, F.C. (1982). The pediatrician and the interdisciplinary process. *Exceptional Children*, 48, 306-314.
- Blake, R.R. & Mouton, J.S. (1964). *The Managerial Grid*. Houston, Texas: Gulf Publishing Co.
- Breaugh, J.A. (1985). The measurement of work autonomy. *Human Relations*, 38, 551-570.
- Breaugh, J.A. (1989). The work autonomy scales: additional validity evidence. *Human Relations*, 42, 1033-1056.
- Breaugh, J.A. & Becker, A.S. (1987). Further examination of the work autonomy scales: Three studies. *Human Relations*, 40, 381-400.
- Busch, P. (1980). The sales managers' bases of social power and influence upon the sales force. *Journal of Marketing*, 44(4), 91-101.
- Cartwright, D. (1965). Influence, leadership, and control. In March, J. (Ed.), *Handbook of Organizations*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1-17.
- Charlesworth, H.K. (1974). *Role strain in Bumiputra Entrepreneur: Can it be overcome?* Unpublished paper submitted to MARA Institute of Technology, Malaysian.
- Churchill, G.A., Ford, N.M., Jr., & Walker, O.C., Jr. (1976). Organizational climate and job satisfaction in the sales force. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 13, 323-332
- Cobb, A.T. (1980). The sales managers' bases of social power and influence upon the sales force. *Journal of marketing*, 44 (4), 91-101.
- Dahl, R.A. (1957). The concept of power. *Behavioral Science*, 2, 201-218.
- Emerson, R.M. (1962). Power-dependence relations. *American Sociological Review*, 27, 31-41.
- Etzioni, A. (1964). *Modern Organizations*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 58-64.
- Fiorelli, J.S. (1988). Power in work groups: Team member's perspectives. *Human Relations*, 41(1), 1-12.
- Ford, J.K., MacCallum & Tait, M. (1986). The application of exploratory factor analysis in applied psychology: A critical review and analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 39, 291-314.
- French, J.R.P. & Raven, N. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in Social Power*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp.150-167.
- Frost, D.E. & Stahelski, A.J. (1988). The systematic measurement of French and Raven's bases of social power in workgroups. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 18, 375-389.
- Gardell, B. (1977). Autonomy and participation at work. *Human Relations*, 30(6), 515-533.
- Gemmil, G.R. & Wilemon, D. (1972). The product manager as an influence agent. *Journal of Marketing*, 36(1), 26-30.
- Hackman, J.R. & Oldham, G.R. (1976). Motivation through the design of work: test of a theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 16, 250-279.
- Harsanyi, J.C. (1962). Measurement of social power, opportunity costs, and the theory of two person bargaining games. *Behavioral Science*, 7, 67-80.
- Hinkin, T.R. & Schriesheim, C.A. (1989). Development and application of new scales to measure the French and Raven (1959) bases of social power. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74(4), 561-567.
- Kipnis, D., Schmidt, S.M. & Wilkinson, I. (1980). Intraorganizational influence tactics: Explorations in getting one's way. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 65, 440-452.
- Kornberg, A & Perry, S.D. (1966). Conceptual models of power and their applicability to empirical research in politics. *Political Science*, 18(3), 52-70.
- Lasswell, H.D. & Kaplan, A. (1950). *Power and Society*. New Haven Yale University Press.
- Loher, B.T., Noe, R.A., Moeller, N.L. & Fitzgerald, M.P. (1985). A meta-analysis of the relation of job characteristics to job satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 70, 280-289.
- Nagel, J.H. (1968). Some questions about the concept of power. *Behavioural Sciences*, 13(3), 129-137.
- Nunnally, J.C. (1978). *Psychometric Theory*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Patchen, M. (1974). The locus and basis of influence on organizational decisions. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 11, 195-221.
- Peabody, R.L. (1961). Perceptions of organizational authority: A comparative analysis. *Administrative Science Quarterly*,

6(4), 463-482.

Podsakoff, P.M., & Schriesheim, C.A. (1985). Field studies of French and Raven's bases of power: Critique, reanalysis and suggestion for future research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 97, 387-411.

Rahim, M.A., (1988). The development of a leader power inventory. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 23, 491-502.

Rahim, M.A. (1989). Relationships of leader power to compliance and satisfaction with supervision, evidence from a national sample of managers. *Journal of Management*. 15, 545-557.

Rahim, M.A. & Buntzman, G.F. (1989). Supervisory power bases, styles of handling conflict with subordinates, and subordinate compliance and satisfaction. *Journal of Psychology*, 123, 95-210.

Rahim, M.A., Antonioni, D., Krumov, K. & Illieva, S. (2000). Power, conflict, and effectiveness: a cross-cultural study in the United States and Bulgaria. *European Psychologist*, 5 (10), 28-33.

Raven, B.H. (1974). The comparative analysis of power and influence. In J.T. Tedeschi (Ed.), *Perspective on Social Power*, Chicago: Aldine.

Roznowski, M. (1989). Examination of the measurement properties of the job descriptive index with experimental items. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74(5), 805-814.

Schopler, J. & Layton, B. (1974). Attributions of interpersonal power. In J. Tedeschi, (Ed.), *Perspectives on Social Power*. Chicago: Aldine.

Shukla, R.K. (1982). Influence of power bases in organizational decision making: A Contingent Model. *Decision Sciences*, 13, 450-470.

Sims, H.P., Szilagyi, A. & Keller, R.T. (1976). The measurement of job characteristics. *Academy of Management Journal*, 19, 196-213.

Smith, P.C., Kendall, L.M. & Hulin, C.L. (1969). *The Measurement of Satisfaction in Work and Retirement: A Strategy for the Study of Attitudes*, Chicago: Rand McNally.

Spector, P.E. (1986). Perceived control by employees: A meta-analysis of studies concerning autonomy and participation at work. *Human Relations*, 39, 1005-1016.

Thibaut, J.W. & Kelly, H.H. (1959). *The social psychology of groups*. New York Wiley.

Twomey, D.F. (1978). The effects of power properties on conflict resolution. *Academy of Management Review*, 21, 144-150.

Warren, D.I. (1968). Power, visibility, and conformity in formal organizations. *American Sociological Review*, 33, 951-970.

Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wrong, D.H. (1968). Some problems in defining social power. *American Journal of Sociology*, 73(5), 673-681.

Yukl, G.A. (1981). *Leadership in Organizations*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Notes

Note 1. Supervisory Power Bases, Work Autonomy and Satisfaction with Supervision

Note 2. Reliability of Scales: Power Bases, Work Autonomy and Satisfaction with Supervision

Note 3. Multiple Regression Analysis: Power Bases and Satisfaction with Supervision

Note 4. Pearson Correlations among Key Variables

Note 5. Paired T-Test for Contrasts of Malay-Chinese on the Perception of Power Bases, Work Autonomy and Satisfaction with Supervision

Table 1. Reliability of Scales: Power Bases, Work Autonomy and Satisfaction with Supervision

Scales	No. of Items	M	SD	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach Alpha
Expert	6	3.45	.76	.46 to .71	.84
Reward	5	3.82	.75	.57 to .76	.85
Referent	5	3.56	.77	.57 to .72	.84
Coercive	5	3.71	.71	.40 to .60	.76
Legitimate	6	3.88	.53	.37 to .54	.73
Work Autonomy	9	3.82	.58	.42 to .74	.85
Satisfaction with Supervision	18	13.10	4.30	.29 to .64	.86
SDS	10	6.26	2.00	-	-

This table shows the mean, standard deviation and standardized Cronbach Alpha and the corrected item-total correlation for each subscale.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis: Power Bases and Satisfaction with Supervision Dependent variable: Satisfaction with supervision

Predicted Variables	b	Standard Error	Beta	T Value
Legitimate	-.348	.451	-.043	-.772
Coercive	-.049	.323	-.008	-.152
Referent	2.689	.359	.486	7.486 *
Expert	1.055	.350	.188	3.020 **
Reward	.818	.364	.142	2.248 **

F = 34.749

Significance F < 0.0001

R (adjusted) = .447

Intercept: a = - 1.738

* p < .0001

** p < .05

Multiple regression analysis was performed to test the criterion related validity of the power scales in relation to its predictive relationship with satisfaction with supervision.

Table 3. Pearson Intercorrelations of Main Variables of Interest

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Expert Power	1.000	.41	.48	.07	.33	.16	.47
2	Reward Power		1.000	.53	.21	.21	.37	.47
3	Referent Power			1.000	.14	.20	.21	.64
4	Coercive Power				1.000	.16	.05	.09
5	Legitimate Power					1.000	.19	.15
6	Work Autonomy						1.000	.23
7	Satisfaction with supervision							1.000

Note: r 's > .11 is significant at $p < .05$

r 's > .21 is significant at $p < .001$

This table shows the intercorrelations among key variables.

Table 4. Paired T-Test for Contrasts of Malay-Chinese on the Perception of Power Bases, Work Autonomy and Satisfaction with Supervision

Variables	Malay Mean	Chinese Mean	t-value
Expert	3.57	3.52	.41
Reward	3.96	3.82	1.18
Referent	3.84	3.52	2.41*
Coercive	3.58	4.01	-3.16**
Legitimate	3.94	3.75	1.52
Work Autonomy	3.78	3.83	- .47
Satisfaction with Supervision	14.48	13.30	1.49

* Significant at 0.05 level (two-tailed test)

** Significant at 0.005 level (two-tailed test)

Degree of freedom 36

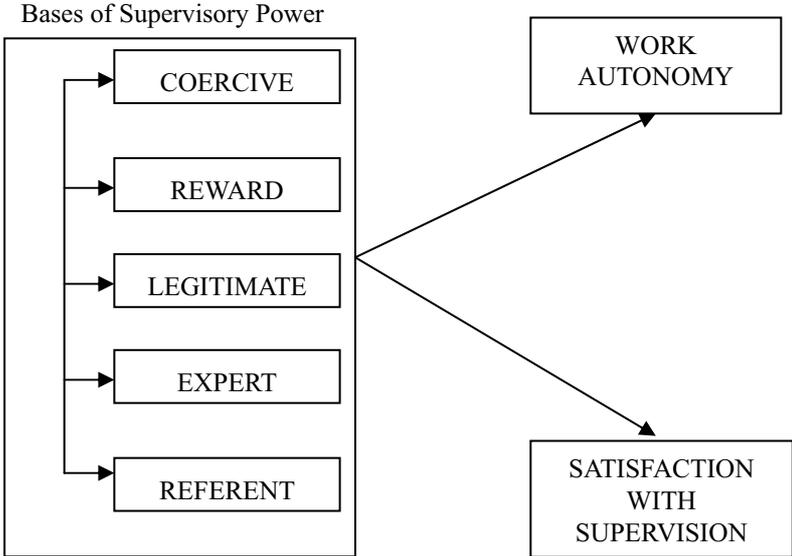


Figure 1. Supervisory Power Bases, Work Autonomy and Satisfaction with Supervision
Supervisory Bases of Power and its interactions variables involving work autonomy and satisfaction with supervision.