

The Relationship Between Leader Power Base and Influence: The Moderating Role of Trust

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Abstract

One of the most significant factors influencing the quality of leader-member relations and leader effectiveness is trust. The purpose of this study is to examine the moderating role of trust between a leaders' power base and their ability to influence their subordinates. The sample consisted of 99 participants in which they responded to a questionnaire that measured 1) the leader's power base (legitimate, coercive, reward, expert, referent, and information) according to French and Raven's (1959) research, 2) the leader's level of influence, and 3) the leader-member level of trust. The results indicate that all bases of power have significant correlations with the trust variable. The trust-influence relationship and the power influence relationship all showed a significant and positive correlation. The results also indicate that the trust variable significantly affects the influence-power base relationships.

Introduction

One of the most significant factors influencing the quality of leader-member relations and the leader effectiveness is trust (Barnes, 1989; Cook and Wall, 1980; Diffie-Couch, 1984). For example, Posner and Schmidt (1984) surveyed over 1,500 managers from around the country asking the following open-ended question: "What values (personal traits or characteristics) do you look for and admire in your superiors?" The most frequent response was trustworthiness and honesty.

In another study, Zand (1972) reported highly significant differences between high trust groups of managers and low trust groups of managers. He concluded that the high trust groups of managers were more effective than the low trust groups. Trust has also been shown to be an accurate predictor of individual satisfaction. Driscoll (1978) discovered that regardless of a person's level of participation in decision making and regardless of the fit between the levels of desired and actual participation, people who trust their leaders more would also be more satisfied.

Other studies have shown the importance of trust within the organization. For instance, Sgro, Worchel, Pence, and Orban (1980) concluded that subordinates reporting to leaders with high interpersonal trust were more satisfied than those subordinates reporting to leaders who were low in interpersonal trust. Based on

these findings they proposed that trust should be considered as a strong potential moderator in determining successful leader-member relationships.

The purpose of this study is to examine the moderating role of trust in a particularly critical relationship, between leaders' power base and their ability to influence their subordinates. In addition to trust, the literature also reveals (Cobb, 1980; French & Synder, 1959; Raven, 1983) that a leader's power base and his/her influence are two important factors that help determine an effective leader-member relationship. However, the role of trust in the power-influence relationship has not been examined.

In reviewing the literature on influence, Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980) focused on the importance of influence within the leadership process by studying influence tactics and their success in gaining response from subordinates. They indicate that without the ability to influence, nothing in an organization can be accomplished and thus the leadership process becomes ineffective.

Bass (1981) states that those who study leadership have often confused power with influence even to the point of treating both concepts as synonymous. He emphasized that they are separate constructs, but are strongly associated with one another within the leader-

ship process. The research of Herold (1977) clearly indicates that the leader's ability to influence a subordinate's performance is conditional upon the leader's power. In their study Hinkin and Schriesheim (1990) found that individuals were able to differentiate between influence behaviors and attributions of power. They concluded that the source of power leaders use will greatly effect the level of influence that they will have upon their subordinates. Therefore, it is most difficult to study influence without studying the antecedents of influence such as a person's power base.

Perhaps the best known and widely accepted framework for studying bases of power is the work of John R. P. French and Bertram Raven. In their article, "The Bases of Social Power," French and Raven (1959) used the following taxonomy to identify five distinct bases of power: *Legitimate Power*: the legitimate right of the leader to make certain kinds of requests and the concomitant obligation of others to respond; *Coercive Power*: the leader's control over punishment; *Reward Power*: the leader's control over rewards; *Expert Power*: the leader's competence related to knowledge and skill as perceive by subordinates; *Referent Power*: the subordinates loyalty and need to identify with the leader.

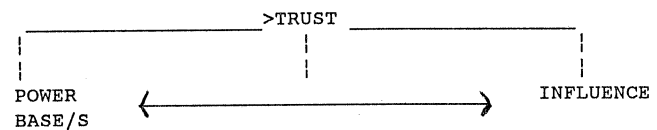
Raven (1974) later added to the list another type of power called "informational power," acknowledging the fact that leaders can attempt to influence their subordinates merely by their access to and control of information.

Research focused on the six power bases has revealed that effective leaders rely most on expert and referent power to influence subordinates, whereas the use of legitimate and coercive power tend to be negatively correlated, or uncorrelated, with leadership effectiveness. Results on reward and informational power tend to be mixed indicating there is no clear trend with respect to their effectiveness (Bachman, 1968; Bachman, Powers, and Marcus, 1968; Busch, 1980; Burke and Wilcox 1971). In light of this research, Yukl and Taber (1983) in their article entitled "Effective Use of Power" call for further research in examining the complex interaction of key organizational variables and their relationship to a leader's power base. The present study was designed to accomplish exactly that by investigating a leader's power base and influence, and to measure their relationship with regards to a leader/member level of trust.

Consistent with the literature reviewed earlier on trust, the purpose of our study was to investigate the previously unexamined moderating effects of trust upon a leader's power base and level of influence. Thus, we empirically measured the importance of trust and its impact upon a leader's power base, influence, and their relationship within a managerial setting. Specifically,

our research questions were: 1) how does the level of trust between leader and member relate to a leader's power base?, 2) how does the level of trust between leader and member relate to the leader's ability to influence?, 3) what is the relationship between a leader's power base and influence?, and 4) how does trust moderate the relationship between a leader's power base and influence?

The following graph pictorially gives form to this study while illustrating the key variables and their relationships.



Within this study, trust was operationally defined as the mutual reliance on character, ability, and strength that exist between member and leader, while power base was defined according to French and Raven's (1959) power bases. Influence, the last variable, was defined as the ability or capacity that a manager has in producing his/her intended effects upon a member's behavior.

Method

Sample

The sample of this study consisted of 99 managers of a private general hospital located in the midwestern part of the United States. All 99 individuals volunteered to participate in the study. The sample included 64 first-line managers, 25 middle managers, and 10 top managers. Demographic data supplied by the participants indicated that 74% were females, 69% were between the ages of 28 and 47, 75% had been managers between 1 to 12 years, while 25% of the participants had a bachelors degree and 9% had an advanced graduate degree.

Instruments

The research questions posed earlier required that we measure the participants' perceptions of (1) the level of trust that existed between them and their superior, (2) the base(s) of power that the superior was relying on to influence them, (3) and the amount of influence that the superior had on them. Therefore, in addition to demographic questions, the questionnaire consisted of 3 scales to measure respondents' perceived power, trust and influence. The power scale consisted of 6 items based on French and Raven's (1959) power bases which are, legitimate, coercive, reward, expert, referent, and informational. The second scale comprised of an item that defined leader/member trust and the last scale also

consisted of 1 item that defined leader influence. Scores from the 3 scales were interpreted as follows: (1) power based scores were determined by the subjects' identifying which of the 6 power bases their manager used, and (2) the level of trust and influence were determined by the respondents' scores on 5 point scales, with 5 representing no trust and no influence, respectively.

Results

The first three research questions may be examined through the results shown in Table 1, the intercorrelations between the 8 variables of interest.

cedure for establishing trust as a moderator variable was the conventional moderated regression based on hierarchical regression analysis (Stone & Hollenbeck, 1984). This procedure builds on a bivariate (influence-power base) regression and then adds trust and the interaction term (trust X power-base) to the regression model. A significant interaction effect is the criterion for establishing trust as a moderating variable.

The results of the moderator analyses shown in Table 2 indicate that the trust variable significantly affects the influence-power base relationship for all six power bases.

TABLE 1
INTERCORRELATIONS OF TRUST, INFLUENCE, AND THE SIX BASES OF POWER

	TRUST	INFLUENCE	LEGITIMATE P	COERCIVE P	REWARD P	EXPERT P	REFERENT P
INFLUENCE	+.49**	--	--	--	--	--	--
LEGITIMATE P	-.27**	-.12	--	--	--	--	--
COERCIVE P	-.34**	-.10	-.11	--	--	--	--
REWARD P	-.20*	-.14	-.18*	-.34**	--	--	--
EXPERT P	+.45**	+.27**	+.40**	+.15	+.31**	--	--
REFERENT P	+.40**	+.18*	+.15	+.21*	+.06	-.10	--
INFORMATION P	+.38**	+.35**	+.34**	+.15	+.31**	-.37**	-.27**

** p = .01

* p = .10

Question 1 was concerned with the relationships between the bases of power and trust. All bases of power have highly significant correlations with the trust variable. But, as expected, not all relationships are positive. Legitimate, coercive and reward power inversely correlate with trust.

On the trust influence relationship (question 2), Table 1 shows a significant and positive correlation. Studying the relationship between power bases and influence (Question 3) reveals only three significant correlations. These correlations, between influence and the three power bases of expert, referent and information, are all positive. The three nonsignificant correlations, on the other hand, are all negative. Since no question was posed concerning the relationships that the power bases might have with one another, it is sufficient to note that there are some significant correlations but no pattern is evident.

Question 4 was whether the strength of the relationship between each base of power and the amount of managerial influence could be attributed to the degree of leader-member trust. Six moderator analyses were performed to examine the role of trust in relationships between influence and the six power bases. The pro-

The regression coefficients of the interaction terms, while rather small in magnitude, are all statistically significant.

Discussion

The results reported above were based on correlational analyses. However, these strong and clear results reveal an interesting pattern that invites, and justifies, causal speculation.

The pattern emerges when the correlations of the bases of power are simultaneously examined with both trust and influence. Subordinate trust appears to be more responsive to the type of power used than the manager's influence on the subordinate. Managerial influence is not significantly increased (in fact as the negative but insignificant correlations indicate, it may drop) when the manager resorts to his/her legitimate, reward or coercive power to influence. Only expert, referent and information power are shown to be effective instruments of managerial influence.

Further, not only are legitimate, reward and coercive power ineffective as instruments of influence, but they also significantly undermine subordinate trust (note the

TABLE 2
THE MODERATING EFFECT OF TRUST ON
THE INFLUENCE-POWER BASE RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship	Moderating Role Of Trust
Influence-Legitimate Power	Significant ($b_x = +.04^{**}$)
Influence-Coercive Power	Significant ($b_x = -.08^{**}$)
Influence-Reward Power	Significant ($b_x = +.02^{**}$)
Influence-Expert Power	Significant ($b_x = +.05^{**}$)
Influence-Referent Power	Significant ($b_x = +.06^{**}$)
Influence-Information Power	Significant ($b_x = +.04^{**}$)

b_x is the regression coefficient of the interaction term (trust x power base.)

** $p = .01$

significant negative correlations between these three bases of power and the trust variable). On the other hand, the three influential bases of power are those that also correlate positively with trust. The results here underscore the role of trust in the relationship between bases of power used by managers and their ability to influence their subordinates. It is clear that the only bases of power that are influential are those that foster trust. Is then the way for leaders to influence through trust? The answer appears to be affirmative. A more direct answer is readily available through the results of the moderator analyses (Question 4).

These results, reported earlier, clearly imply that the amount of trust that already exists between a manager and his/her subordinates has a significant impact on the extent to which the base of power he/she is using to influence the subordinates is effective; trust affects the power bases' effectiveness in cultivating managerial influence. This result is particularly interesting in the case of legitimate, coercive and reward power which were shown (Table 1) not to have an independent effect on managerial influence. Whatever impact these bases of power have on managers' ability to influence their subordinates seems to be through the level of manager--subordinate trust.

Legitimate, coercive, and reward power may be labeled negative bases of power in light of the nature of their correlations with the trust and influence variables (see Table 1). Expert, referent, and information, then, may be called positive bases. The negative and positive bases of power fall within the common categorization of power bases as organizational and individual (Schermerhorn, 1982), respectively. What negative bases have in common is that they are organizationally based. That is, a manager rewarding, coercing or otherwise exerting authority may be doing so according to his/her organiza-

tional role. The three positive bases, on the other hand, may be practiced by any individual. Thus, based on the results obtained here, one can suggest that negative bases of power are organizational and positive bases of power are individual. The practical implication of this suggestion is that managers should try to influence as individuals despite their role as their subordinates' manager. That is, despite their availability, the organizationally sanctioned bases of power should not be considered appropriate for influencing subordinates.

The results obtained here are consistent but go beyond the findings of previous research. As reviewed earlier, referent and expert power have been generally accepted as the more preferable instruments of influence, coercive and legitimate are seen as the least preferable, with no conclusive results on reward or information power (Bachman, 1968; Bachman, Powers and Marcus, 1968; Busch, 1980; Burke and Wilcox, 1971). Based on our results, information power can now be included among the preferable, individual bases of power, and reward power can be included among the undesirable, organizational bases of power. The organizational-individual dichotomy obtained here provides empirical support to French and Raven's (1968) classification of their power bases into two categories: positional and personal. Power bases comprising these two classes are the same as our organizational and personal bases, respectively.

This paper also goes beyond the current literature in clarifying the role of trust. While the significance of trust has long been recognized (Barnes, 1989), and while calls have been made for examining trust as a variable moderating leader-member relations (Sgro, et al., 1980), it has not been examined in the context of the power-influence relationship. The rather conclusive results here indicate that trust is more responsiveness than influence to the type of power used by the manager. Loss of trust appears to be the more immediate victim (than influence) of managers' resorting to legitimate, coercive or reward power. It is clear that both in management practice and research more attention should be given to the effect that type of power has on how much subordinates trust the manager rather than on how much they are influenced by the manager.

Conclusion

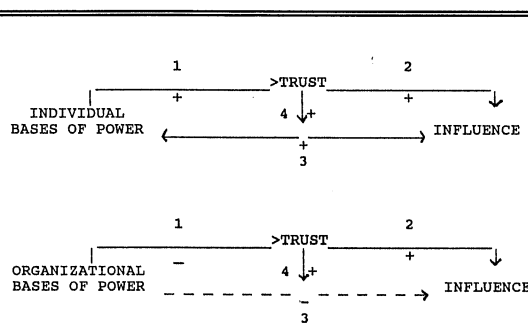
Based on the results obtained in this study we can now refine the model depicting our four research questions. We propose two models differentiating the roles of what we labeled organizational and individual bases of power (see Figure 1).

The primary difference between the two models is in the sign on the arrow connecting power bases to trust (Arrow 1). The difference in signs starts a chain

reaction with the final result being opposing impacts on the influence variable. The individual bases of power ENHANCE influence through their direct, positive effect on the influence variable (3), and indirectly through their positive effect on the trust variable (1). The trust variable, in turn, amplifies the positive effect through both its direct and positive link to the influence variable (2) and through its moderating role on the power base-influence relationship (4). The organizational bases of power, on the other hand, WEAKEN influence primarily through their direct negative effect on trust (1).

Both the discussion here and the depictions in Figure 1 indicate causal linkages while the analyses performed were essentially correlational. As stated earlier, the causal conclusions are justified due to the clarity, strength and consistency of the results. Nevertheless, to confirm our conclusions, rigorous causal analyses are in order. The models depicted in Figure 1 should serve as a framework for such analyses.

FIGURE 1
CONTRASTING ORGANIZATIONAL
AND INDIVIDUAL BASES OF POWER



NOTE:

1. The plus and minus designations on the models indicate whether the two variables connected by each arrow change in the same direction (+) or in opposite directions (-).
2. The numbers on the arrows correspond to the 4 research questions examined.
3. The dotted line signifies a statistically non-significant relationship.

Suggestions for Future Research

It would be beneficial if further research would attempt to replicate this study, while investigating the generalization of the results to diverse occupations and working groups. Additional research could pursue the following applicatory questions: 1) how can leaders increase the level of trust through the utilization of positive power bases, and 2) how can leaders acquire true individual power bases with an organizational setting.

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