



**Faculty of Economics and Business**

**POWER BASES AND JOB STRESS:  
THE IMPACT OF MENTORING**

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**Bachelor of Economics with Honours  
(Industrial Economics)  
2009/2010**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my honest and sincere thanks for the encouragement and help given by a number of delightful people and institutions in the preparation of this thesis. In the absence of their assistance, it would not have been possible to complete the thesis.

Most importantly, I deeply appreciate my supervisor, Dr. Lo May Chiun, who has patiently led and advised me throughout the course of the thesis. Although I am not originally from the Management discipline, she has not ever hesitated to put me on the correct path of investigation, and frequently redirected my steps from unproductive by-ways. She has enriched my understanding by her extensive experience in this study. She is a continuous challenge and source of support. I owe her the countless hours she used in educating me on my thesis. It is indeed difficult for me to quantify my gratitude towards her and I feel honoured to be under her guardianship.

I would like to recognize Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional Malaysia (PTPTN) for granting me the loan in August 2007. Without this loan, I am not able to continue my study in this Degree programme.

I also owe gratitude to many people in the banking sector in Kuching who have willingly cooperated in the difficult task of data collection.

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**BASES OF POWER AND JOB STRESSES:  
THE IMPACT OF MENTORING**

**ABSTRACT**

The general objective of this research was to examine the relationship of supervisors' power bases and subordinates' stresses with the impact of mentoring. This study was conducted in banks in Kuching. A field study with a sample of 195 respondents in 10 banks in Kuching was conducted to examine three widely hypothesized relationships. Data were collected from the respondents by means of questionnaires. By and large, the outcomes from the analyses have demonstrated partially support for the hypotheses. The first hypothesis which examines the relationship of positional power bases of the leaders and subordinates' stresses showed that legitimate power of the leaders is positively related to relaxation, reward power of the leaders is positively related to role ambiguity/lack of control and relaxation, and coercive power of the leaders is positively related to role ambiguity/lack of control, overload, and psychological discord. The second hypothesis which examines the relationship of personal power bases of the leaders and subordinates' stresses showed that personal power of the leaders is negatively related to psychological discord and connection power of the leaders is negatively related to relaxation. The third hypothesis which examines the impact of mentoring on the relationship of power and job stress showed that career support is moderating the relationship of power, such as reward power, personal power and role ambiguity/lack of control, moderating the relationship of reward power and overload, moderating the relationship of power, such as reward power, connection power and psychological

discord, moderating the relationship of coercive power and relaxation, while psychosocial support is moderating the relationship of power, such as legitimate power, reward power and role ambiguity/lack of control, moderating the relationship of power, such as reward power, coercive power and overload, moderating the relationship of reward power and psychological discord. Inevitably, this research offers a conceptual basis for the effective use of power bases. This research may be useful for those who are in positions of leading, to help them understand more clearly the bases of their own actions, and the possible choices to their actions. Practically, this study points to the fact that Kuching's supervisors need to be trained in the effective use of power bases.

## **ASAS KUASA DAN TEKANAN PEKERJAAN:**

### **KESAN PENASIHAT**

#### **ABSTRAK**

Objektif am penyelidikan ini ialah untuk menyelidik hubungan antara asas kuasa penyelia dan tekanan subordinat dengan kesan penasihat. Kajian ini diadakan di bank di Kuching. Satu kajian dengan sampel sebanyak 195 respondent di 10 bank di Kuching diadakan untuk menyelidik tiga hubungan hipotesis am. Data dikumpul daripada respondent melalui borang soal selidik. Secara amnya, hasil daripada analisa telah menunjukkan sokongan yang sederhana untuk tiga hipotesis ini. Hipotesis pertama yang menyelidik hubungan antara kuasa asas kedudukan penyelia dengan tekanan subordinat menunjukkan hubungan positif antara kuasa sah penyelia dengan istirahat, hubungan positif antara kuasa hadiah penyelia dengan pengkaburan peranan/kekurangan kawalan dan istirahat, dan hubungan positif antara kuasa paksaan penyelia dengan pengkaburan peranan/kekurangan kawalan, beban terlampau, dan perbantahan psikologi. Hipotesis kedua yang menyelidik hubungan antara kuasa asas peribadi penyelia dengan tekanan subordinat menunjukkan hubungan negatif antara kuasa peribadi penyelia dengan perbantahan psikologi dan hubungan negatif antara kuasa pengikatan penyelia dengan istirahat. Hipotesis ketiga yang menyelidik kesan penasihat ke atas hubungan antara kuasa dan tekanan pekerjaan menunjukkan bahawa sokongan kerjaya meringankan hubungan antara kuasa seperti kuasa hadiah, kuasa peribadi dengan pengkaburan peranan/kekurangan kawalan, meringankan hubungan antara kuasa hadiah dengan beban terlampau, meringankan hubungan antara kuasa seperti kuasa hadiah, kuasa pengikatan

dengan perbantahan psikologi, meringankan hubungan antara kuasa paksaan dengan istirahat, manakala sokongan psikososial meringankan hubungan antara kuasa seperti kuasa sah, kuasa hadiah dengan pengkaburan peranan/kekurangan kawalan, meringankan hubungan antara kuasa seperti kuasa hadiah, kuasa paksaan dengan baban terlampau, meringankan hubungan antara kuasa hadiah dengan perbantahan psikologi. Tidak dinafikan bahawa penyelidikan ini menawarkan satu platform konsepsi dalam keberkesanan penggunaan kuasa asas. Penyelidikan ini mungkin berguna kepada mereka yang berada dalam kedudukan untuk memimpin, untuk membantu mereka memahami secara lebih jelas asas tindakan mereka, dan kemungkinan yang timbul ekoran daripada tindakan mereka. Secara praktikal, kajian ini merumuskan bahawa penyelia di Kuching perlu dilatih dalam penggunaan kuasa asas yang lebih berkesan.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

People are the most important elements in an organization. So, it is essential to make sure that the relationship among employees is well managed. If there is misunderstanding, miscommunication or quarrel among employees, the performance of the organization will be affected affirmatively, and the worst will lead the organization to be inoperative. Therefore, leaders exist to manage their followers.

Leadership is a power relationship that exists between leaders or followers (Northouse, 2001) and a process which involves utilizing power to influence the behaviours of others to meet the organizational goals (Handy, 1993). There are different types of leadership styles such as the trait approach, the behavioural approach, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, charismatic leadership, participative leadership, and so on. Leaders practise different types of leadership style according to their personalities, objectives, and situations.

In order to manage their followers, leaders need power. Leader power is “the ability of one party to change or control the behaviour, attitudes, opinions, objectives, needs, and values of another party” (Rahim, 1989). The extent to which the leader can influence subordinates determined its strength (Dahl, 1957; French & Raven, 1959; Hersey, Blanchard & Natemeyer, 1979; Krausz, 1986). The source of power that leaders use is censorious to the effect they gain. There are two categories of power, which are position power and personal power. Position power consists of legitimate power, coercive



power, and reward power, while personal power consists of expert power, referent power (French & Raven, 1959), connection power, and information power (Hersey *et al.*, 1979; Raven, 1965). Leaders cannot simply utilize their power to control subordinates because they are proactive. Therefore, mentoring occurs as an important element in the relationship of leaders and subordinates, or so called mentors and mentees.

Mentoring, by definition is an attempt to transfer experience and expertise from experienced individuals in an organization to the less experienced (Gregson, 1994). Besides that, mentors also provide support to their mentees. The supports provided are career support and psychosocial support. Career support involves coaching, sponsorship, and protection and is associated with increased exposure and visibility, facilitating career advancement and satisfaction in an organization (Kram, 1983, 1985; Noe, 1988; O'Neill, 2002). The psychosocial support encourages protégés, helps them endure frustration and provides advice on how to balance work and family issues. It stimulates self-esteem, sense of competence, and self-efficiency (Kram, 1983; Chao, 1997). The quality of mentoring relationship is important as it strongly affects job stress of mentees.

There are four factors of job stress, which are psychological discord, role ambiguity/lack of control, relaxation, and overload (Smith, Everly & Johns, 1993). Psychological discord is the result of cognitive interpretation of environmental events. It is less related to mentors' behaviour. The factors that relate highly to mentors' behaviour are role ambiguity/lack of control, relaxation, and overload. Job functions are very important especially to a newbie. Mentors are responsible to let them know about their job functions. Irresponsible mentors will ignore their mentees and cause them to hang around at workplace because of role ambiguity. This will lead to job stress on mentees

because they are afraid to be scolded by the manager for not doing their jobs. Lastly, mentors who assign jobs without considering their mentees' capability will cause stress on them, which is measured by the degree of relaxation and job overloading.

### **1.1.1 The Malaysian Scenario**

There are several leadership styles practised by management level employees in Malaysia. Trompenaars (1993) ascertained that Malaysian managers prefer a relationship-oriented leadership style. Nevertheless, there is no available fact to propose that identical relationship-oriented style can be used effectively in Malaysia.

There are many bureaucratic organizations such as government institutions, large manufacturing plants, and traditional family-owned companies in Malaysia. Directive leadership is still quite prevalent in these organizations where supervisors continue to direct and plan work for employees, and rigid rules and policies are enforced (Lee & Ahmad, 2009). Working conditions in such bureaucratic cultures may not immediately prefer supportive leadership styles, where efficiency and strict adherence to dominate are valued; a manager who chose a softer, caring technique may risk losing respect from older employees and obtain lazy workers who acquire benefit of the open, friendly atmosphere. For that reason, the supportive manager needs to alter his leading style, possibly by acquiring a more directive leadership style (Lee & Ahmad, 2009).

Hofstede (2003) proposes that Malaysian organizations' culture indicates high scores for power distance and masculinity-femininity dimensions when compared to Australia, UK and USA. In addition, Hofstede also illustrates Malaysian as a more collectivist nature community, meaning that there is close ties among individuals and a

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greater tolerance for a diversity of opinions. This consequence suggests superior and subordinates in Malaysia show greater acceptance of autocratic and paternalistic leadership behaviours. Associated with Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Asma and Lim (2001) and Lim (2001) tested these cultural dimensions in different private and public organizations in Malaysia and they detected similar patterns with Hofstede's work with relatively high levels of power distance and high levels of the collectivist nature within the Malaysian organizations.

Hofstede's findings are further elaborated and expanded by the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) study (Ashkanasy, 2002; Kennedy, 2002). When compared to other countries involved in the GLOBE study, Kennedy (2002) argues that acceptance of power distance in Malaysia is less extreme than Hofstede's (1984) original work and Asma's and Lim's (2001) and Lim's (2001). Kennedy (2002) further argues that Malaysia is balanced with strong human orientation in superior-subordinate relationship even though it can be considered as a culture with high-power distance. In addition, effective leaders in Malaysian organizations are expected to demonstrate compassion while using more of an autocratic, rather than a participative style (Kennedy, 2002). Nevertheless, consistent with Hofstede's work, the GLOBE's study also indicates collectivist nature in Malaysian organization and this strongly suggests preference of Malaysian employees to work as a group. For example, it is more possibly for Malaysian employees to use coordination to accomplish tasks, and use team workflows to deal with task uncertainty (Pearson & Chong, 1997). There is also a high preference for teamwork goals rather than individual goals (Chan & Pearson, 2002) and

they incline to be more idealistic in-group performance (Karande, Rao & Singhapakdi, 2002).

A significant large number of male managers in the Malaysian corporation observe that women do not show interactive leadership style, whereas women are not aware that interactive leadership style is more effective in dynamic environments. On the other hand, male managers are unaware that they are underutilizing the unique leadership characteristics of women (Koshal, Gupta & Koshal, 1998).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Malaysians suffering from job stress is not a new issue. It is happening continuously and will not stop no matter how long the time has passed. There are many factors that contributed to job stress. Job stress emerges when people face circumstances that they appraise as taxing or surpassing their resources and endangering their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A politically-charged workplace is one of such circumstances. Employees cannot be certain that their efforts will be rewarded or have confidence that they will not be put at risk by the actions of others when a workplace is politically charged. This unpredictable, risky, and threatening workplace context increases the level of job stress experienced (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997) for those who are not able to evade such contexts as well as those who have decided to join in the politicking.

Stress can also exist if the employees feel “under loaded” through lack of stimulus or social contact. Other job stress contributors comprise role ambiguity, conflicting performance expectation, and poor relationships with other co-workers (Manshor,

Fontaine & Chong, 2003). Stress at work is also associated with other circumstances that including individual, socio-economic, and family factors (Swanson, Power & Simpson, 1998). Numerous other unmeasured variables that can contribute to stress at the work place are found by the earlier study on sources of stress at the work place in Malaysia (Manshor, 2000). These comprise individual and family factors, socio-economic and financial status, and mental and physical health factors.

Besides, job stress will also appear because of the relationship of individuals with their mentors. Erkutlu and Chafra (2006) hypothesized that perceived supervisory position powers, which are legitimate, reward, and coercive power would be positively related to subordinate stress because they are likely to evoke a lack of personal control at work. Not solely is the subordinate highly dependent on the supervisor (Emerson, 1962), the administration of the reward or punishment by the supervisor also lies beyond the subordinate's direct control. Subordinate stress is likely to be provoked by the perceived lack of control and the anxiety associated with the need to satisfy the supervisor (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991; Kahn & Byosiere, 1992; Elangovan & Xie, 2000). For that reason, perceived supervisor reward and coercive power will be positively connected to subordinate stress. Similarly, because the subordinate is reminded of responsibilities to be fulfilled and realizes that his or her performance will be monitored and evaluated, perceived legitimate power of the supervisor would be positively related to stress. Subordinate stress will likely be increased by the constant focus on duties and evaluation.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The purposes of this study are:

- 1) To examine whether position power such as legitimate power, coercive power, and reward power will affect job stress of subordinates like psychosocial discord, role ambiguity/lack of control, relaxation, and overload.
- 2) To investigate whether personal power such as expert power, referent power, connection power, and information power will affect job stress of subordinates.
- 3) To determine whether mentoring such as career support and psychosocial support will moderate the relationship of position power and job stress of subordinates.
- 4) To test whether mentoring such as career support and psychosocial support will moderate the relationship of personal power and job stress of subordinates.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1) Will position power, such as legitimate power, coercive power, and reward power affect job stress of subordinates?
- 2) Will personal power such as expert power, referent power, connection power, and information power affect job stress of subordinates?
- 3) Will mentoring moderate the relationship of position power and job stress of subordinates?
- 4) Will mentoring moderate the relationship of personal power and job stress of subordinates?

## **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms are defined operationally for the purposes of this study:

- **Mentoring:** An attempt to transfer experience and expertise from experienced individuals in an organization to the less experienced (Gregson, 1994).
- **Formal Mentoring:** The organization provides and sets the support structures to ensure that participants have clarity of purpose and the support they may need to make a successful relationship (Karkoulian, Halawi & McCarthy, 2008).
- **Informal Mentoring:** Two people without the assistance and guidance of the organization establish a developmental alliance (Karkoulian *et al.*, 2008).
- **Career Support:** Sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments (Kram, 1980).
- **Psychosocial Support:** Role modelling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counselling, and friendship (Kram, 1980).
- **Leadership:** A power relationship that exists between leaders or followers (Northouse, 2001) and a process which involves utilizing power to influence others behaviours to meet the organizational goals (Handy, 1993).
- **Power:** A useful resource which is “legitimate” when leaders use it, and “illegitimate” if a non-leader utilize it (Clegg & Hardy, 1999).
- **Position Power:** The power that comes from external sources; power that comes from an office (Law, 2005).
- **Personal Power:** The power that comes from within; an inherent power (Law, 2005).
- **Legitimate Power:** A generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of