

The Multi-Dimensional Nature of Power Bases in a Non-Western Context

The Case of Malaysia

May-Chiun Lo and T. Ramayah

Abstract

Past researches have observed a shift in the dimensions of power bases behavior. Power bases possessed by the managers have often been known as the essence of leaders' behavior which is the major driving force behind this continuous recognition of power in the management literatures. The purpose of the research reported here is to test empirically and to validate a conceptualization of bases of power that consists of five dimensions developed by French and Raven (1959). Data was gathered through a survey using a structured questionnaire to employees working in 61 large manufacturing companies in Malaysia with a total of 276 respondents. A series of tests such as factor analysis, correlation, and reliability analysis was conducted to confirm that the instrument is valid (content, construct, convergent, discriminant and nomological) as well as reliable. Implications regarding the value of conducting validity and reliability test for practitioners and researchers are discussed.

Keywords: Power bases, goodness of measure, validity, reliability, multicultural society, manufacturing

INTRODUCTION

Many studies on leaders or supervisory powers have shown that power sources have been conceptualized in various ways (Bhal and Ansari, 2000; French and Raven, 1959; Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson, 1980). Further, power can be derived from sources inherent in the organization, interpersonal relationships, and the characteristics of the individuals (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). In broadest terms, power has to do with getting things done, or getting others to do them. Social power exists when people with differing levels of potential power interact to accomplish the goals of the organization. Despite the importance of

examining power behaviors of managers in organizations for leadership effectiveness, a review of the literature have revealed a lack of consensus about the dimensionality of power bases, particularly in the Malaysian context. Researches related to bases of power (Ansari, 1990; Bruins, 1999; Bugental and Lewis, 1999; Kipnis et al., 1980; Yukl and Falbe, 1990) provided a taxonomy of the different power bases, identified situations under which people used different bases of power, and examined how targets of influence responded to different types of power. However, these behavioral dimensions have yet to be differentiated from one another in the empirical literature even though many scholars have claimed that power is composed of conceptually distinct behavioral dimensions. Past literatures have revealed that bases of power are often interdependent, used in combinations or overlapped with one another. As noted by Farmer and Aguinis (2005), a major reason for the gap in the literatures on power is that theorists have paid scant attention to the study of such issues as the relationship and interaction

May-Chiun Lo (Corresponding author)

Faculty of Economics and Business
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Sarawak

T. Ramayah

Operations Management Section
School of Management
Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11900 Penang