Effects of perceived power of supervisor on subordinate work attitudes

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Activities associated with the appropriation, preservation, and use of power pervade most organizations. McClelland and Burnham (1976) contend that the acquisition and maintenance of power is one of the most socially motivating processes that occurs in organizations. Researchers in several disciplines (e.g. industrial/organizational psychology, social psychology, organizational behavior) have paid considerable attention to issues surrounding social power and influence processes (Podsakoff and Schriesheim, 1985) and to the acquisition and exercise of power in organizations (House and Singh, 1987). At the macro level of analysis, such attention has been focused mostly on the structural and environmental factors that affect the distribution of power in organizations (e.g. Hings et al., 1974; Pfeffer, 1981). At the individual level of analysis, research has been conducted on the relationship between power and leadership (managerial) motivation (McClelland, 1985; McClelland and Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland and Burnham, 1976; Miner, 1978; Stahl, 1983; Winter, 1973).

Another stream of inquiry has focused on employee perceptions of the power wielded by supervisors and their effects on work attitudes and behaviors. This body of research, especially, has attracted considerable attention from leadership researchers because a supervisor's power or influence (and, subsequently, effectiveness) depends on how it is perceived by the subordinate (Yukl, 1981). Several researchers (e.g. Calder, 1977; Raven, 1990) have argued that power is mostly attributions made by people to explain events rather than an objectively verified phenomenon; thus they have stressed the importance of studying the perceptions of the followers to better understand the leadership process. From a social information processing perspective, the power relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate constitutes an important aspect of the subordinate’s social environment. The social environment significantly influences the subordinate’s perceptions, which in turn are critical to understanding his or her attitudes and behavior (Griffin, 1983; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). Thus perception, although subjective in nature, emerges as an important mediating variable for leader power and subordinate behavior and a key predictor of employee well-being. For example, research suggests that perceptions of reward, coercive, and legitimate power of the supervisor are negatively related to subordinate performance and job satisfaction (Podsakoff and Schriesheim, 1985). Guendelman and Silberg (1993) found that perceptions of work-related factors influence health as much as the “objective” nature of the job.

More recently, the trend in organizations towards more horizontal structures has further underscored the need to fully understand employee perceptions of supervisor power. As organizations attempt to dismantle the hierarchy in favor of multifunctional teams structured around core processes, and give these teams considerable autonomy to set goals, evaluate output, and adopt initiatives, they have significantly altered the traditional role of the supervisor (Daft, 1985). Supervisors in these horizontal corporations act more as process co-ordinators who facilitate task completion rather than playing the traditional roles of planning, directing and monitoring. However, little attention has been paid to the impact of employee (subordinate) perceptions of these changes in the supervisor’s role on their attitudes and behaviors. Understanding of the relationship between subordinate perceptions of supervisor power and their work attitudes is essential to gauge the implications of changing structures and roles in organizations.
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Current research objectives

One of the most influential frameworks for studying the effects of perceived supervisor power on subordinate work attitudes and behaviors has been the French and Raven’s (1959) classification of five distinct bases of social power such as reward, coercive, legitimate, expert, and referent power. The five leader power bases have been found to be related to such employee criteria variables as performance (e.g. Sheridan and Vredenburgh, 1978), productivity (e.g. Fiorelli, 1988), satisfaction with supervision (e.g. Busch, 1980; Rahim, 1989), job satisfaction (e.g. Martin and Hunt, 1980; Molm, 1991), and turnover and absenteeism (e.g. Busch, 1980; Martin and Hunt, 1980). To a lesser degree, the relationships between leader power and goal and role clarity (e.g. Frost and Moussavi, 1992), and support of supervisor (e.g. Thamhain and Gemmill, 1974) have been investigated. Podsakoff and Schriesheim’s (1985) review concludes the prior research on the effects of perceived power of supervisor on subordinate criteria variables.

Although the French and Raven framework has proven useful, research in this area has not yet presented a comprehensive picture of the patterns of relationships between leader power bases and key organizational and employee-related variables. Studies to date can be roughly classified as focusing on:

- the relationship between supervisor power and subordinate behaviors (e.g. absenteeism, performance, turnover);
- the effects of supervisor power on various interpersonal facets of the supervisor-subordinate relationship (e.g. conformity, influence, support for the supervisor); and
- the relationship between supervisor power and subordinate work attitudes (e.g. job satisfaction, commitment).

Missing from this body of research, however, are inquiries into the relationships between perceived supervisor power and other crucial subordinate criteria variables such as motivation and stress.

The pivotal role of motivation in organizational behavior has been well acknowledged (e.g. Evans, 1986; O’Reilly, 1991). Ilgen and Klein (1988) not only noted the direct impact of motivation of organizational members on the productivity of the unit, but also emphasized the importance of understanding the factors that affect motivation. According to Ilgen and Klein, such understanding helps to construct or modify conditions in the work setting so as to encourage individual behavior consistent with the overall goals of the organization. Recognizing the continuing interest in and the plethora of studies on motivation, O’Reilly (1991) argued that the importance of the topic for practitioners would increase further in the next decade as the number of new workers entering the workforce declines and their diversity becomes more salient. Despite such interest in motivation, the relationship between perceived leader power and employee motivation has been relatively under-investigated. Prior research has focused more on the behavioral outcomes of motivation such as performance (e.g. nursing behaviors (Sheridan and Vredenburgh, 1978)) and productivity (e.g. medical-team meetings (Fiorelli, 1988), rather than motivation per se. However, given that numerous other factors such as skill level, resources, and opportunity, influence these variables, it is important to focus directly on motivation rather than its behavioral outcomes to reduce the number of potential confounds. The paucity of research on the effects of the perceived power of the supervisor on motivation represents a significant limitation given: motivation’s central place in organizational productivity and effectiveness; and that supervisor-subordinate interactions and unequal power distributions are pervasive features of modern organizations. A better understanding of these effects will offer insights into positively influencing employee motivation.

Similarly, job stress has become a key concept for academic research and management practice because of its significant impact on employees and organizations. The relationship between job stress and a number of physical and mental ailments has been well documented (e.g. Kahn and Byosiere, 1992). Employee stress also leads to significant costs for the organization by adversely affecting employee performance and prompting withdrawal behavior, as reflected by increased absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover (Ganster and Schaubroeck, 1991). Several researchers (e.g. French et al., 1982; Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980) have posited the employee’s social environment at work, which includes power relations, as a major source of employee stress. However, the relationship between leader power and subordinate stress has not been systematically studied, although certain types of leader power, such as expert power, have been found to be negatively related to...
subordinate tension (Sheridan and Vredenburgh, 1978).

Lastly, this study addresses the disparity in findings between the Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) study and prior research by re-investigating the relationships between perceived supervisor power and subordinate satisfaction and commitment. For example, Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) found that reward, legitimate, and referent power bases were positively related to subordinate global satisfaction, and that coercive power was negatively related to global satisfaction. However, prior research did not yield any evidence for these relationships. Similarly, although prior research found that only expert power was related to employee organizational commitment, Hinkin and Schriesheim reported positive relationships between referent and expert power and employee commitment (coercive power was negatively related). Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) argued that the discrepancies are due to the psychometrically unsound measures used in the past. This study uses the Hinkin and Schriesheim measures in an attempt to replicate or repudiate their findings.

In sum, this study attempts to enhance our understanding of the effects of perceived supervisor power on the subordinate by: examining the relationships between types of perceived supervisor power and subordinate motivation and stress; and re-examining the relationships between perceived supervisor power and subordinate satisfaction and commitment.

Theory and hypotheses
Perceived supervisor power and subordinate motivation
Drawing on different theories of motivation, it can be argued that perceived legitimate, reward, expert and referent power of the supervisor will be positively related to subordinate work motivation. From an equity theory perspective (Adams, 1963; Weick and Nesset, 1988), individuals are motivated to balance their efforts to their rewards. Extending this, it can be argued that high perceived legitimate power of the supervisor will increase the salience of duties and enhance a sense of responsibility and obligation of the subordinate. This will likely motivate the subordinate to fulfill the duties and responsibility in order to be equitable with the outcomes received such as pay, status, recognition, adequate working conditions, etc. Perceiving the supervisor as having high reward power suggests that the subordinate will recognize the increased possibility of obtaining certain rewards. From an expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) viewpoint, this will increase the instrumentality (performance-reward probability) component for the subordinate and, thus, increase motivation. Similarly, high perceived supervisor expert power suggests guidance and assistance for accomplishing tasks, which will therefore increase the expectancy (effort-performance probability) component for the subordinate and positively affect motivation. From a goal-setting theory perspective (Locke, 1968), when the supervisor’s expert power is perceived as being high, probability of goal acceptance is high since goal difficulty will be perceived as realistic and the subjective probability of succeeding will be high, leading to high motivation. Similarly, high referent power of the supervisor will be associated with high motivation as a result of feelings of admiration and identification, a need for personal acceptance by the supervisor, and increased acceptance of goals.

H1. Perceived legitimate, reward, expert, and referent power of the supervisor will be positively related to subordinate work motivation.

Studies on reinforcement and discipline (Arvey and Ivancevich, 1980; Beyer and Trice, 1984) suggest that the use of punishment has significant negative consequences, including lowered productivity. Extending this argument, it is hypothesized that perceived coercive power of the supervisor will be negatively related to subordinate motivation since coercive power is generally associated with reprimands and penalties.

H2. Perceived coercive power of the supervisor will be negatively related to subordinate work motivation.

Perceived supervisor power and subordinate stress
Karasek’s (1979) job demands-control model offers a theoretical basis for exploring the relationship between perceived supervisor power and subordinate stress. The model hinges on the psychological role that personal control plays in determining how individuals respond to their jobs and work demands. According to the model, job demands thrust the employee into an aroused state. If the arousal is accompanied by the employee’s high personal control over work, it will likely be released in the normal execution of the job. On the other hand, if the arousal is accompanied by a perception of low personal control, the arousal cannot be
We hypothesized that perceived supervisory legitimate, reward, and coercive power would be positively related to subordinate stress because they are likely to evoke a sense of lack of personal control at work. For instance, the subordinate’s perception that the realization of his or her fears, hopes and expectations are contingent on the decisions of the supervisor will increase the salience of the supervisor’s power to affect outcomes and the subordinate’s dependency. Not only is the subordinate highly dependent on the supervisor (Emerson, 1962), but the administration of the reward or punishment by the supervisor also lies beyond the subordinate’s direct control. The perceived lack of control and the anxiety associated with the need to satisfy the supervisor are likely to provoke subordinate stress (Ganster and Schaubroeck, 1991; Kahn and Byosiere, 1992). Therefore, perceived supervisor reward and coercive power will be positively related to subordinate stress. Similarly, perceived legitimate power of the supervisor would be positively related to stress, because the subordinate is reminded of responsibilities and obligations to be fulfilled and realizes that his or her performance will be monitored and evaluated. The constant focus on duties and evaluation apprehension will likely increase subordinate stress.

H3. Perceived legitimate, reward, and coercive power of the supervisor will be positively related to subordinate stress.

Expert power and referent power of the supervisor, on the other hand, were hypothesized to have a negative relationship with subordinate stress. Perceiving one’s supervisor to be high on expert and referent power can be seen as similar to having a strong social support system at work: the subordinate would consider the supervisor’s expertise to be a source of work support (e.g. resource for clarifying issues and tackling difficult problems) while the supervisor’s personal appeal and likability would induce a sense of interpersonal support. Several researchers have noted the significant benefits of having strong social support in dealing with stress (e.g. Cohen and Wills, 1985; Kahn and Byosiere, 1992). Strong social support helps people cope positively with stressful events by acting as a buffer against stress as well as contributing to their psychological and physical well-being. More specifically, expert power of the supervisor serves to reassure the subordinate in terms of reducing job uncertainty, handling task complexity, enabling role and goal clarity (Busch, 1980), thus leading to lower stress. Referent power of the supervisor increases the attraction and acceptance of the supervisor by the subordinate thus enhancing the pleasantness of the work and lowering stress. Previous research findings showing that expert power and referent power are positively correlated with subordinate affect (Podsakoff and Schriesheim, 1985), and expert power is negatively associated with subordinate job tension (Sheridan and Vredenburgh, 1978) lend further support to this notion.

H4. Perceived expert and referent power of the supervisor will be negatively related to subordinate stress.

Method

Sample
Data were collected from 165 graduate business students enrolled in a large public university. Most subjects were part-time students and employed at the time of the study. Subjects were, on average, 31 years old and had eight years of full-time work experience. Of the respondents, 61 per cent were male.

Procedure
Subjects were given the option of participating or declining to participate before the survey questionnaires were administered to them. They were briefly informed prior to the survey that the study pertained to how they feel about their jobs, their supervisors, and the organizations they work for. They were given the opportunity to clarify any doubts and ask questions. Finally, they were encouraged to answer all the questions candidly and were assured of complete anonymity.

Measures
Perceived supervisor power
Hinkin and Schriesheim’s (1989) scales were used to measure perceived supervisor power. These scales consist of 20 items (four items per power scale) on a five-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Reliability analysis showed alpha coefficients of 0.81 (reward), 0.90 (coercive), 0.88 (legitimate), 0.88 (expert), and 0.86...
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(REFERENT). The 20 items were also factor-analyzed to confirm the proposed five-factor structure. Five factors (with eigenvalues greater than 1) emerged from the maximum likelihood extraction before rotation and jointly accounted for 66 per cent of the variance. The results from the oblique rotation yielded strong support for the five bases of power. The items designed to measure legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, and referent power loaded on the appropriate factors. Examples of items used include: My supervisor can “increase my pay level” (reward), “make things unpleasant here” (coercive), “provide me with needed technical knowledge” (expert), “make me feel that I have commitments to meet” (legitimate), and “make me feel personally accepted” (referent).

Work motivation
Work motivation was measured using the revised OAI Supervisor and Member Questionnaire (Van de Ven and Ferry, 1980). Two separate measures – internal self-motivation and work effort expended – were used. The internal self-motivation measure had four items using a five-point scale (ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”). An example of the items would be “I feel a great sense of personal accomplishment when I do this job well”. The work effort expended measure had two items using a five-point scale (ranging from “very much” to “none”), e.g. “how much did you try to improve your job performance in the past three months?”. The alpha coefficient (reliability) was 0.79 for the internal self-motivation and 0.65 for work effort.

Work stress
Work stress was measured using the Parker and DeCotiis (1983) scale consisting of 13 items with a five-point response scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Examples of items include: “I have felt fidgety or nervous as a result of my job” and “working here leaves little time for other activities.” The alpha coefficient (reliability) was 0.88 for the scale.

Satisfaction
Three measures of satisfaction were used to measure satisfaction. They are the Supervisor-Human Relations and Supervisor-Technical Ability subscales (representing satisfaction with supervision) of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) (Weiss et al., 1964) and the short MSQ global satisfaction measure (Johnson and Weiss, 1971). The former two measures assess the subordinate’s satisfaction with the supervisor’s human relation ability and technical ability respectively. Reliability analyses revealed alpha coefficients of 0.91, 0.88 and 0.89 for the three scales respectively.

Commitment
The Mowday et al. (1979) Commitment scale was used to measure commitment. The scale had an alpha coefficient (reliability) of 0.93.

Control variables
The subject’s demographic variables such as gender, age, and job tenure were controlled for in the regression analyses of the hypotheses.

Checking for mono-method bias
Since the data for this study were collected from a single source, i.e. subordinate self-reports, confirmatory factor analyses using LISREL were performed to identify and partial out any possible method effects. A series of hierarchically nested covariance structure models based on the specifications developed by Widaman (1985) (modified to suit the unimethod approach here) were used for this purpose. To demonstrate that the results are not due to method effects, the addition of a method factor (latent construct) to a t-trait factor (latent constructs) model (oblique) must not significantly improve the fit over the model with just the t-trait factor (oblique) specification. Further, the trait factors’ loadings must continue to be significant in the method and trait factors model (i.e., the t-trait factor model-oblique with a method factor loading on all the indicators). The LISREL analyses were run on 33 indicators (20 from the power measure, 13 from the stress measure) with six trait factors (five for power, one for stress), and a method factor. The LISREL analyses showed that the fit of the model did not improve significantly with the addition and specification of method parameters over the trait parameter specifications alone (i.e., over the t-trait factor model-oblique). The overall chi-square fit statistics for the t-trait factor (oblique) model was $\chi^2 (480) = 1341.80$, $p = 0.00$, GFI = 0.718 while the fit statistics for the t-trait factor (oblique) with methods factor model was $\chi^2 (447) = 1191.13$, $p = 0.00$, GFI = 0.755. Although the overall chi-square statistics are significant, the incremental fit index yielded a rho of 0.018, which suggests insignificant improvement (Bentler and Bonnet, 1980) (i.e. it indicates that method effects are insignificant). Further, the trait factor loadings were significant even after the method effects were partialled out. In sum, this suggests that the respondents did differentiate between the variables and that the results obtained in the correlation and regression analyses are indicative of the true relationships among the variables.
Results

Table I presents the means, standard deviations, reliability (alpha) coefficients, and intercorrelations of the variables. H1 predicted a positive relationship between perceived legitimate, reward, expert, and referent power of the supervisor and subordinate work motivation. The zero-order correlations provided support for the hypothesis. Specifically, these four power bases were positively related to subordinate internal motivation with the correlations ranging from 0.21 \((p < 0.01)\) to 0.33 \((p < 0.001)\). Reward power and expert power were also positively related to work effort expended by the subordinate \((r = 0.21, p < 0.01)\). Legitimate power and referent power, however, were not related to work effort.

H2, suggesting a negative relationship between perceived coercive power of the supervisor and subordinate work motivation, was not supported. Coercive power was not significantly associated with internal motivation and work effort of the subordinate. H3, which predicted a positive relationship between perceived supervisor legitimate, reward, and coercive power and subordinate stress, received modest support. Legitimate power and coercive power showed positive relationships with subordinate stress. The correlations were 0.19 \((p < 0.05)\) and 0.34 \((p < 0.001)\) respectively. The correlation between reward power and subordinate stress was nonsignificant. Perceived expert power and referent power of the supervisor were not significantly related to subordinate stress, thus failing to support H4 which posited a negative relationship between these two power bases and stress. These results are presented in Table I.

In summary, the hypothesized positive relationships between perceived supervisor legitimate, reward, expert, and referent power and subordinate motivation were confirmed, whereas the proposed negative relationship between coercive power and subordinate motivation was not supported. While legitimate power and coercive power were positively associated with subordinate stress, perceived expert, reward and referent powers of the supervisor were not significantly related to stress.

Regression analyses were also performed to further examine the relationships between perceived supervisor power and subordinate motivation and stress and to gauge the relative explanatory power of each power base. The five power bases were entered as predictors for each of the dependent variables. The results of the regression analyses are presented in Table II. Perceived legitimate power and coercive power of the supervisor emerged as important predictors for subordinate stress, but reward, expert, and referent power bases were not significant predictors. These results are consistent with those obtained from the correlation analysis (Table I). For subordinate motivation, however, the regression analyses yielded fewer significant relationships between perceived supervisory power and motivation than the correlation analysis. Specifically, perceived legitimate power and reward power of the supervisor appeared to be significant predictors of subordinate work motivation (legitimate power for internal motivation and reward power for work effort). Coercive, expert, and referent power bases, however, were not significant predictors of subordinate work motivation. Overall, the results of the regression analyses were consistent with but more conservative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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<td>1 Legitimate power</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Reward power</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Coercive power</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Expert power</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>88</td>
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<td>5 Referent power</td>
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<td>0.79</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>39</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<td>6 Stress</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.78</td>
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<td>02</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>08</td>
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<td>7 Internal motivation</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>79</td>
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<td>8 Work effort</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>04</td>
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<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Global satisfaction</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.61</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>10 Supervisory satisfaction-human relations</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-38</td>
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<td>91</td>
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<td>11 Supervisory satisfaction-technical ability</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>61</td>
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<td>12 Commitment</td>
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<td>1.28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>93</td>
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</table>

Notes: \(N = 165\); Reliabilities (coefficient alpha) are on the diagonal; decimals were omitted from correlations and reliabilities; \(r = 0.16, p < 0.05\); \(r = 0.20, p < 0.01\); \(r = 0.25, p < 0.001\)
than the results from the correlational analysis: perceived legitimate power and coercive power of the supervisor were major predictors of subordinate stress while perceived legitimate and reward power were important predictors of subordinate motivation.

**Perceived supervisor power and subordinate satisfaction and commitment**

This study also examined the relationships between perceived supervisor power and subordinate global satisfaction, satisfaction with supervisor, and commitment to explore the reasons for the conflicting findings between Hinkin and Schriesheim’s (1989) study and prior research. The correlations are presented in Table I.

Global satisfaction of the subordinate was positively related to the supervisor’s legitimate, reward, expert, and referent power. The correlations ranged from 0.19 (p < 0.05) to 0.31 (p < 0.001). Global satisfaction was negatively associated with coercive power (r = -0.29, p < 0.001). Coercive power was also negatively related to satisfaction with supervisor’s technical ability (r = -0.24, p < 0.01) and human relations ability (r = -0.38, p < 0.001). Legitimate, expert, and referent power demonstrated a positive relationship with both aspects of satisfaction with the supervisor. The correlations ranged from 0.31 to 0.61 (p < 0.001). The correlations between reward power and the two aspects of satisfaction with the supervisor were nonsignificant. A subordinate’s commitment was positively related to supervisor’s perceived legitimate, reward, referent, and expert power. The correlations ranged from 0.25 to 0.33 (p < 0.001). Coercive power demonstrated a negative relationship with commitment (r = -0.25, p < 0.001). Results of regression analyses were, albeit relatively more conservative, consistent with the correlation findings: perceived coercive power of supervisor emerged as an important predictor for both subordinate satisfaction and commitment; legitimate power and reward power were significant predictors of subordinate commitment; and referent power and expert power were significant predictors of subordinate satisfaction with supervision (see Table II).

A closer examination of the correlations yielded from prior research, the Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) study, and the present study suggests that our results were very similar to those reported by Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989). Twelve of the 15 tested correlations between perceived supervisor power and subordinate global satisfaction, satisfaction with supervisor, and commitment, paralleled Hinkin and Schriesheim’s (1989) findings. Table III presents the nature of the relationships reported by prior research, the Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) study, and the present study.

### Table II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Legitimate</th>
<th>Reward</th>
<th>Coercive</th>
<th>Expert</th>
<th>Referent</th>
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<td>Stress</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>5.37***</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.24***</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<td>Internal motivation</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>4.72***</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work effort</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>2.83*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global satisfaction</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>8.91***</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.20***</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory satisfaction – human relations</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>24.49***</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.39***</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.45***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory satisfaction – technical ability</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>28.82***</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.24***</td>
<td>0.51***</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>10.37***</td>
<td>0.35*</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
<td>-0.39***</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

**Discussion**

In general, the results supported most of our hypothesized relationships between perceived-supervisor power and subordinate stress and work motivation. Our findings revealed a complex pattern of relationships between perceptions of supervisory power and subordinate motivation and stress.

First, different types of leader power appear to be related to subordinate responses in different ways (Table I). For instance, legitimate power of the supervisor was positively related to subordinate internal motivation, satisfaction, and commitment, but also associated with higher subordinate stress. Coercive power of the supervisor, on the other hand, was associated with lower subordinate satisfaction and commitment but higher stress, and did not affect the...
subordinate’s motivation to work. Reward power had a positive relationship with subordinate motivation, global satisfaction and commitment, but was not significantly related to stress. Researchers in the past have often classified expert power and referent power into the category of “positive” bases and legitimate, reward, and coercive into “negative” bases (e.g. Frost and Moussavi, 1992). The findings of this study suggest that such classifications may be oversimplifications. Certain forms of supervisory power can be motivating as well as stressful for subordinates. The multiple effects of the different types of power acquired by the leader require serious consideration.

Second, the five types of supervisor power varied in their ability to predict different subordinate criteria variables (Table II). The results showed that perceived coercive power of the supervisor was a major predictor of subordinate stress and satisfaction, while perceived reward power was an important predictor of subordinate work motivation. Perceived legitimate power, however, emerged as a significant predictor of both stress and motivation. Further, perceived coercive, reward and legitimate powers were all significant predictors of subordinate commitment. Interestingly, expert power and referent power (the personal-power bases), emerged as strong predictors of satisfaction with the supervisors compared to the nonpersonal-power bases (e.g. legitimate, reward) but were not significantly related to subordinate motivation, stress or commitment. These results not only lend support to the notion that the five power bases are distinct but, more importantly, they suggest that no single base of power is all-beneficial in influencing subordinates or all-powerful as a predictor of employee criteria variables. Managerial effectiveness appears to be contingent on the fit between the type of power and the subordinate criteria variable of interest.

Contrary to our predictions, perceived coercive power was not negatively related to subordinates’ motivation, and supervisor expert power and referent power were not negatively related to subordinate stress. It is possible that high referent and expert power of the supervisor positively affects interaction and satisfaction with the supervisor, but does not fully eliminate the stress associated with actually performing the job or interacting with other co-workers. Another explanation might be that individual differences dilute the relationship between perceptions of supervisor power and employee responses. The results also lend strong support to Hinkin and Schriesheim’s (1989) findings regarding the relationships between perceived supervisor power and subordinate satisfaction and commitment. This can be interpreted as support for Hinkin and Schriesheim’s assertion that the inconsistencies between their results and those of past research are a result of the psychometric inadequacies of prior studies.

It is important to note that the cross-sectional nature of the data makes it impossible to rigorously examine the causality between perceived leader power and subordinate response. However, this study does contribute to our understanding of the nature of the relationship between these two sets of variables. Also, the issue of relying on self-reported data inevitably raises the question of common method variance. Two lines of reasoning, nevertheless, offer support for the validity of the results. For one thing, the measures used

| Table III |
| Zero-order correlations yielded from prior research, Hinkin and Schriesheim’s study, and the present study |
| | Legitimate | Reward | Coercive | Expert | Referent |
| Satisfaction with supervisor | | | | | |
| Prior research | +, −, ns | +, −, ns | − | + | + |
| H and S’s study (1998) | + | + | − | + | + |
| Present study | + | ns | − | + | + |
| Global satisfaction | | | | | |
| Prior research | ns | ns | ns | nc | ns |
| H and S’s study (1998) | + | + | − | + | + |
| Present study | + | − | − | + | + |
| Commitment | | | | | |
| Prior research | ns | ns | ns | + | ns |
| H and S’s study (1998) | ns | ns | − | + | + |
| Present study | + | + | − | + | + |
| Notes: ns = non-significant; nc = non-conclusive | | | | | |
in this study are well-developed instruments with proven psychometric properties, which suggest that they are likely resistant to common method variance (Spector, 1987). Moreover, results of the confirmatory factor analyses using LISREL to partial out method effects showed that the findings in this study are indicative of true relationships among the variables.

Overall, this study has provided useful information regarding the general effects of supervisor power on subordinate stress and motivation. Future research needs to seek a fuller understanding of how perceptions of supervisor power may influence employee responses. There are a number of important questions that remain unresolved. Are subordinate perceptions of supervisor power influenced by critical incidents between the subordinate and the supervisor or by observations of the supervisor’s dealings with others or both? How does organizational culture influence these perceptions of supervisory power? Do perceived impressions of the organization or the senior management get personalized to become impressions of one’s immediate supervisor? Additional empirical studies are required to address these questions and enhance our understanding of this area.

From a practitioner standpoint, the results appear to suggest that different perceptions of supervisor power (i.e., different types of power) might differentially affect employee motivation, satisfaction, commitment and stress. For instance, perceiving a supervisor as being high on referent power might promote a pleasant relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate, but may not directly increase the subordinate’s motivation and work effort. The fear of possible reprimands and punishment might prompt a subordinate not to slip up on work performance but at the same time reduce his/her attachment to the job and the organization. In light of these effects and the implications for supervisory effectiveness, managers should pay more attention to how their power is perceived by their subordinates as well as carefully examine the trade-off between short-term and long-term consequences of such perceptions.

References


A.R. Elangovan and Jia Lin Xie
Effects of perceived power of supervisor on subordinate work attitudes
