

Leadership and power: A study of the constructs of follower-perceived leadership style and leadership power

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship among the constructs of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire as measured by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ (5X) and power style as measured by the Rahim Power Inventory (RLPI). The sample ($N = 182$) of participants came from an armed forces operation center; 56 of which are in the Army, 60 in the Navy and 66 in the marines. The purpose of this study was to answer the questions: what are the relationships between followers' perceptions of their military leaders' transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles, and followers' perceptions of their military leaders' power styles, as moderated by years in service, gender, age, ethnicity, and education level? The results show that there was a positive correlation between transformational leadership style and expert, referent and reward power ($r = .595, .584, \text{ and } .458$ respectively). Results also showed that there was a positive correlation between transactional leadership style and expert power ($r = .533$). Conversely, there was a negative correlation between passive leadership and expert power ($r = -.428$). These findings suggested that expert power was a consistent predictor of leadership in the military. This study also found a strong correlation of .885 between the constructs of transformational leadership and transactional leadership. This suggests that these two constructs may not be separate and distinct as theorized by Bass and Avolio (1994).

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Laissez Faire Leadership, Military, Power.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership can be conceptualized to be two-dimensional. Carlyle (1840) conceptualized leadership as a special trait that resides in leaders. Bass and Avolio (1990) conceptualized leadership as the center of group process. Whether scholars agree with leadership as a process or they disagree with the trait theory, scholars have to agree that there is one theme central to leadership; it is a crucial part of accomplishing a common and organizational goal. Military leadership is distinct around knowledge, structure, chain of command, and precise definitions of ranks and authority with numerous definite rules that stipulates behaviors and actions. This study is to investigate if leadership is present in this dynamics and how military leaders use power to influence across varieties of context and people as well as the factors impacting the influence process.

Gardner (1990), in his introduction on leadership, emphasized the need for leaders who are exemplary, who inspire, who stand for something, who help us set and achieve goals. Leaders of today have to confront many dynamics, yet leadership is expected from our Presidents and CEOs. Bennis (2003) understood that while leadership was hard to define, lack of leadership was obvious when it was absent and puzzling in its presence. Part of the problem of defining leadership was dealing with the concept as an abstract rather than as part of a complex social process. The abundance of leadership topics in the literature and in the press was a testimony to the pursuit for a better understanding of this social construct.

Inherent in the definition of leadership is influence. Power and influence are intrinsic to all human relationships (Leary, 1957), so their relevance for the attainment of societal and organization goals was without doubt. According to James MacGregor Burns (1978), to understand the nature of leadership requires understanding of the essence of power, for leadership is a special form of power. A leader cannot lead without first acquiring power, and a leader cannot be great without knowing how to use power. Some leaders use power as a means to an end, and some leaders see power as an end to the means; a combination of both skills is rare. Researchers have considered power traditionally as a largely destructive force in an organization, and it is especially corrupting of those with high power (Ashforth, 1997; Kanter, 1977; Welbourne & Trevor, 2000). Kipnis (1976) found that those in power attempted to control others and that they devalued them as incapable. However, power can have both a positive as well as a negative implication (England de Jong & van Witteloostuijn, 2004). Effective leaders are very perceptive in managing to accumulate power and in using it to some great end. Understanding the concepts of power and influence is essential in understanding leadership.

Leadership requires the exercise of influence or power (Kotter, 1982). According to Gardner (1990), leadership and power are not the same thing. The sources of power are infinitely varied. "Power can be defined as the ability of one party to change or control the behavior, attitudes, opinions, objectives, needs, and values of another party" (Rahim,

1989, p. 545). The definition suggests that research on power is limited to the influence of one individual (leader) over another individual (subordinate). Several taxonomies of leader power have been suggested (Yukl & Falbe, 1991), but the bases of power suggested by French and Raven (1959) – coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent – appear to be the most popular in application (Cobb, 1980; Frost & Stahelski, 1988; Rahim, 1989). There were attempts to expand this taxonomy to include other power bases; however, Gaski (1986) has argued that these assumed power sources are represented by the French and Raven (1959) context and this has been upheld with wide-ranging applications. Leadership always has a measure of power, but many power holders have no trace to leadership (Gardner, 1990). Leadership studies have found that leaders make use of a variety of approaches to influence the behavior of others. The use of these tactics was a function of several conditions, including sources of power, lines of authority, nature of the task, and desired outcome (Yukl, Guinan, & Sottolano, 1995). An examination of how power fits into the concept of leadership must be explored within the context of the nature of leadership. The nature of leadership has been explored a great deal over the past few years (Avolio, 1994; Barbuto, Fritz, & Marx, 2000). Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) explored power and influence tactics and established a moderate relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, investigations of leaders' bases of social power (French & Raven, 1959) and the personality of leaders may offer valuable insight into the situational background of transactional and transformational leadership.

The field of leadership study has undergone much transformation in the past decade. Research ranges from the one-dimensional model of leadership (Katz, Maccoby, & Morse, 1950) to the two-dimensional model of initiating structure and consideration (Stogdill & Coons, 1957), to the recent transformational–charismatic leadership theory (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1994). The field has witnessed significant advances in theory development and empirical work. Despite the stream of research work, transformational leadership theory still captured much of the research attention (Judge & Bono, 2000).

The notion of transformational leadership can be traced back to Burns's (1978) qualitative classification of transactional and transformational political leaders; however, it was the conceptual work by House (1977) and Bass (1981) that brought the concept of transformational leadership to the forefront of leadership research. Transformational leadership is often contrasted with transactional leadership. Transformational leaders gain the respect and trust of their subordinates, they inspire them by formulating a vision and setting a challenging goal, stimulate them intellectually to be innovative, and show consideration by giving individual attention to each subordinate. In contrast to transformational leaders, transactional leaders interact with their followers on an exchange basis. Transactional leaders use a contingent reward approach, recognizing and rewarding their subordinate's accomplishments on agreed-upon objectives. The most widely used measure of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership is the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999). There are several versions of this instrument (Bass, 1998); however, the most common is the short Form 5X (Avolio & Bass, 2002). The transactional, as well as transformational constructs of leadership (Bass, 1985, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994) have become increasingly popular in the last few decades. This research will pursue the notion of the relationship between the full range of the leadership model and power.

The nature of transformational leadership implies that leadership involves relationship, influence, and some notions of virtue or morality. Burns (1978) argues that the purposes of leaders and followers become fused and their respective bases of power become the mutual support or foundation essential to their achievement of a common purpose. If this is an accurate opinion of the research community, it is rather concerning that specific studies investigating the relationship among leadership and power have gone somewhat uncharted. This is for the most part disturbing considering that research indicates that influence is critical to the creation of effective leadership.

PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

According to Northouse (2004), there is a relationship between the concept of power and leadership because power is an element of the influence process and one does not exist without the other. One of the main challenges of using power is an exploratory and precarious process. This is mainly because power and coercion are part of the influence process. The distinction between power and coercion is in the moral ends. Coercion describes leaders as wielder of power and as dominators (Northouse, 2004). What makes this a precarious process is that coercion and power are both necessary to achieve a goal; however, our definition suggests that leadership is reserved for those individuals who influence a group of individuals towards a common goal. Leaders who use coercion are interested in their own goal and seldom are interested in the wants and needs of subordinates (Northouse, 2004). The type and amount of power necessary will depend on what needs to be accomplished and on the leader's skill in using what power is available (Yukl, 2002). The amount of overall power that is necessary for effective leadership and the mix of different types of power are questions that research has begun to answer (Yukl, 2002). A leader should avoid the use of coercive power if possible because it is difficult to use and can have unnecessary consequences. This research suggests that for leaders to be effective, they must subscribe to power and not coercion. What types of leaders use power effectively? Burns (1978) argues that the combination of transactional and transformational leadership is the most effective form of leadership. Burns (1978) emphasized that leadership is purposeful and in transactional leadership the purposes of both leader and follower, which started out separate, become fused. Furthermore, in transformational leadership, power bases are linked not as counterweights, but as mutual supports for a common purpose.

Downton (1973) was the first to introduce the term transformational leader in *Rebel Leadership*, and Burns (1978) popularized the concept in his seminal work on leadership. Transformative leadership, according to Burns (1978), takes place when one or more persons engage themselves in a relationship where both leaders and followers deliberately raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Bass and Avolio (1994) introduced the "Full Range" leadership scale employing the transformational, transactional and the laissez-faire styles. Power and leadership behavior are considered by most researchers to be independent, yet interrelated aspects of leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Numerous studies has been conducted on power (e.g. Mulder, de Jong, Koppelaar, & Verhage, 1986; Yukl & Falbe, 1991), and Leadership style (van Engen, van der Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001), but little has been done to

investigate the relationships among these constructs. Consequently, there was little objective understanding of how leadership style influences how leaders use power. Behavioral influence tactics have been useful in examining the differences between the behaviors of leaders in different levels of a hierarchical organization (Yukl & Falbe, 1991) and the differences in influence behaviors between managers and their superiors, peers and subordinates (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, Blaauw & Vermunt, 1999). Power is an influential tactic used regularly by leaders. The complex configuration of power and leadership offers an interesting framework in which to study the influential power used by leaders.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Is there a relationship between followers' perceptions of the leaders' transformational leadership style, and followers' perceptions of their leaders' power style, as moderated by years in service, gender, age, ethnicity, and education level?
2. Is there a relationship between followers' perceptions of the leaders' transactional leadership style, and followers' perceptions of their leaders' power style, as moderated by years in service, gender, age, ethnicity, and education level?
3. Is there a relationship between followers' perceptions of the leaders' Laissez-faire leadership style and followers' perceptions of their leaders' power style, as moderated by years in service, gender, age, ethnicity, and education level?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative correlational design. More specifically, it employed regression analysis. Several descriptive statistics, correlations, and regression analyses were used to estimate the relationship of power style and the leadership constructs variables. To establish these relationships, the study used multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between the dependent variable of leadership style and the independent variables of power, years in service, gender, age, ethnicity, and education level.

Participants in this study were active duty and enlisted members of an armed forces operational unit from a South Texas Navy Operation center. The center comprised of three branches of the armed forces: The Navy battalion, Marines battalion and the Army Infantry units. Participants for the purpose of this study were asked to rate their immediate leaders. Each unit of the armed forces participated in the survey. The total participating sample size was 250, however only 220 surveys were returned. There were several missing data in the sample and the data from only 181 participants were reported in this study. A demographic questionnaire and two instruments were administered to participants in the study to collect data on leadership construct, and power. The leadership instrument used to identify leadership style was the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ (5X) (Bass and Avolio, 2002). The MLQ measures 7 constructs; four construct of transformational leadership style, two construct of transactional leadership style, and one construct of laissez-faire. The Rahim Leadership Power Inventory (RLPI) was used to measure the perceptions of subordinates regarding their

supervisors' bases of power (Rahim, 1988). The RLPI measures the 5-power base constructs: coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, referent power.

RESULTS

Demographic Descriptive Statistics

The resulting sample of 181 participants was comprised of 155 males or 85.6% and 26 or 14.4% females. The sample was not ethnically diverse. There were five separate ethnic backgrounds reported by participants in the study, with the Hispanic ethnicity strongly dominating. Most respondents were Hispanic/Latino/Spanish Origin (94.4%), followed by White (3.3%), Black (1.1%), Filipino (0.5%) and 0.5% made up of the other category. Participants' age ranged from 19 to 55 years with a mean age of 28.6 and standard deviation of 7.7 years. Highest education attained by participants ranges from high school to graduate degree. Most respondents completed some college (50.3%), followed by high school (27.1%), BS/BA (12.7%), Associate degree (8.8%) and Graduate (1.1). Years in service ranged from 1 to 38 years with a mean of 7 years and standard deviation of 5.8. Most respondent were in the Marines (34.8%), followed by Navy (34.3%), and Army (30.8%).

MLQ Descriptive Statistics

Participants scored a mean of 2.7 for transformational leadership in a scale ranging from 0 to 4 with a standard deviation of 0.836. The mean score for transactional leadership was 2.61 in a scale ranging from 0 to 4 with a standard deviation of 0.818. The mean score for passive leadership was 1.25 in a scale ranging from 0 to 4 with a standard deviation of 0.911.

RLPI Descriptive Statistics

The mean score for coercive power style was 3.59 in a scale ranging from 1 to 5 with a standard deviation of 0.804. The mean score for reward power style was 3.50 in a scale ranging from 1 to 5 with a standard deviation of 0.66. The mean score for legitimate power style was 3.82 in a scale ranging from 1 to 5 with a standard deviation of 0.68. The mean score for expert power style was 3.82 in a scale ranging from 1 to 5 with a standard deviation of 0.81. The mean score for referent power style was 3.70 in a scale ranging from 1 to 5 with a standard deviation of 0.87.

DATA ANALYSIS

Findings – Analysis of Null Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis One: There is no relationship between power style construct scores and Leadership MLQ Transformational Leadership.

In order to test null hypothesis one, a stepwise multiple regression was conducted on all the null set with a significance level at $p = 0.5$ using the predictor variables of age, education, ethnicity, gender, years in service, the French and Raven power styles and transformational leadership. Significant predictors of transformational leadership included expert power, referent power, and reward power. Expert power of the supervisor accounted for 31.5% of the variance; referent power accounted for an additional 2% of the variance, and reward power accounted for an additional 1.2% of the variance. The full model summary is displayed in Table 1 (See Appendix).

There was a strong positive relationship between the significant power styles and transformational leadership style. The more expert power the leader used, the more transformational the follower perceived the leader ($\beta = .598$, $p = .000$) ($r_p = .598$, $p = .000$). The use of referent and reward power are contributory to the variance, but not to the level of expert power. The more referent power the leader used, the more transformational the follower perceived the leader ($\beta = .292$, $p = .000$) ($r_p = .219$, $p = .000$). The more reward power the leader used, the more transformational the follower perceived the leader ($\beta = .187$, $p = .000$) ($r_p = .201$, $p = .000$). Based on the findings, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Null Hypothesis Two: There is no relationship between power style construct scores and Transactional Leadership.

To test null hypothesis two, a stepwise multiple regression was run using the predictor variables of age, education, ethnicity, gender, years in service, and French and Raven's power styles and the criterion variable of transactional leadership style. The only significant predictor of transactional leadership style was expert power of the supervisor, which accounted for 22.6% of the variance in transactional leadership. The model summary is shown in Table 2 (See Appendix).

There was a strong positive relationship between the expert power style and transactional leadership style. The more expert power the leader used, the more transactional the follower perceived the leader ($\beta = .533$, $p = .000$) ($r_p = .533$, $p = .000$). The use of any other power styles did not predict transactional leadership. Based on the findings, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Null Hypothesis Three: There is no relationship between power style and passive Leadership.

In order to answer null hypothesis three, a multiple regression was run using the predictor variables of age, education, ethnicity, gender, years in service, and the French and Raven power styles and the criterion passive leadership style. The only power styles that were significant predictors of passive leadership were expert power. The result found that expert power accounted for 17.9% of the variance for passive leadership style.

As indicated in table 3 (See Appendix), there was a strong negative relationship between the expert power style and transactional leadership style. The less expert power

the leader used, the more passive the follower perceived the leader ($\beta = -.428$, $p = .000$) ($r = -.428$, $p = .000$). Based on the findings, this null hypothesis was rejected. (See table 3 in Appendix)

Summary of findings

Findings of this research indicate strong correlations between the full range leadership model and power. Coercive power is correlated to transformational, and transactional, leadership ($r = .161$, $p < .05$ and $.186$, $p < .01$ respectively). Reward power was correlated to transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership ($r = .372$, $.314$, $p < .01$ and $-.162$, $p < .05$ respectively). Legitimate power was correlated to transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership ($r = .347$, $.318$ and $-.319$ respectively, $p < .01$). Expert power had the strongest correlations with transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership ($r = .562$, $.475$, and $-.423$ $p < .01$ respectively). Referent power had the second strongest correlation with transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership ($r = .527$, $.390$, and $-.402$ $p < .01$ respectively).

Expert, referent, and reward powers had significant positive relationship with transformational leadership behavior. Expert power was the only predictor of transactional leader. Also, expert power was the only predictor for passive leadership. In summary, expert power was the predictor or one of the predictors for all leadership styles. All null hypotheses were rejected.

Other control variables and power

Other control variables that had small, but significant correlations with transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership are branch of service and ethnicity in table 4 (See Appendix).

Branch of service contributed about 2.3%; ethnicity contributed about 1.9% to transformational leadership. Branch of service contributed about 4.8%, and ethnicity contributed about 1.7% to transactional leadership. Ethnicity contributed to 1.9% to laissez-faire leadership. All other controls have no relationship with any of the leadership styles.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Transformational, Transactional and Laissez-Faire Leadership

The results of this research confirmed that expert, referent, and reward power are predictors for transformational leadership. The more of these power bases the leader exercised, the more transformational the follower perceived him or her. Expert power predicted transactional leadership. The more expert power the leader possessed, the more transactional the follower perceived him or her. Expert power predicted laissez-faire leadership. The less of these powers the leader exercised, the more laissez-faire the

follower perceived him or her. Referent, legitimate and expert powers are the three strongest powers ($M = 3.70, 3.80, 3.80$ respectively).

Expert power was a unique predictor across all leadership types. This may be organization specific and due to the hierarchy and leadership selection in the military. Personal communication with experts in the field indicated that there are specific policies and practices which the military must follow. Additionally, the unique predictor of expert power may be indicative of several reasons including the rules and regulations in the military service and the importance placed on training in the military. Recruits into the military undergo basic training, and many individuals go on to advanced training in a specialized field. There are several tests administered after training to establish competency of skills.

Expert power is the only true social power that resides completely in the person (French & Raven, 1959). This power comes from the leader's ability, skills, or expertise to perform his or her function in an excellent fashion. In the military, this type of power is highly specific and limited to the particular areas in which the expert is trained and qualified. There are several long-standing rituals in the military, one of which is the award or decoration of personnel with badges issued by the military branches for ranks, expertise, recognitions, and achievements of individuals in various professions. These honors or awards are displayed on military uniforms to symbolize accomplishments in the field of expertise. In essence, expertise is worn on uniform as a visual symbol and a means to identify leadership in the military.

Limitation of findings

There are several limitations with this research and should be considered in the general interpretation of the study results. The study participants came from a convenience sample from an armed forces operation center and the results may not be generalizable outside similar populations.

Recommendations and future research

The findings of this research are compelling, but as with much research, it has raised many more questions than those it answered. Future research should focus on examining the relationship between the full range model of leadership behaviors and French and Raven's power styles in organizations other than the military. Additionally, the specific nature of the relationship between expert power and the various leadership styles could be further examined in the military population. Future studies might, for example, examine the relationship between expert power, the full range model of leadership behavior, and various aspects of performance in the military population, as well as perceived effectiveness of leaders. Finally Future investigation should explore the intervening variable of ethnicity and its relationship to the FRL model and power styles.

Implication for management

The result of this research could have a great implication on hiring, training and selection of leaders in organization. This research informs that the main power style across all leadership style is expert power.

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Appendix

Table 1

Model Summary for Transformational, Expert, Referent, and Reward Power

Model	R	Std Error of the R Square	R Square Estimate	Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig
1 (a)	.598	.358	.6720	.358	100.387	1	180	.000
2 (b)	.624	.389	.6575	.031	9.030	1	180	.003
3 (c)	.414	.404	.6458	.025	7.530	1	180	.007

Note. a Predictor: Expert, b Predictor: Expert, Referent, c Predictor: Expert, Referent, Reward

Table 2

Model Summary for Transactional Leadership and Expert Power

Model	R	Std Error of the R Square	R Square Estimate	Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig
1 (a)	.533	.284	.694165	.284	71.439	1	180	.000

Note. a Predictor: Expert.

Table 3

Model Summary for Passive Leadership, Expert Power

Model	R	Std Error of the R Square	R Square Estimate	Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig
1 (a)	.428	.183	.826033	.183	40.313	1	180	.000

Note. A Predictor: Expert

Table 4
Summary of Table of Control Variable and Power

Summary Table: Control Variable and Power			
	R for Power	R for Power + Controls	ΔR
Transformational	.653	.691	.048
Transactional	.553	.623	.07
Passive	.457	.498	.04

J B

S B