Power, Conflict, and Effectiveness: A Cross-Cultural Study in the United States and Bulgaria

M. Afzalur Rahim[1], David Antonioni[2], Krum Krumov[3], and Snejana Ilieva[3]

[1]*Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY, USA,* [2]*University of Madison, WI, USA,* [3]*Sofia University, Bulgaria*

This study investigated the relationships of bases of leader power (coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent) and styles of handling interpersonal conflict (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising) to subordinates' effectiveness. Data for this study were collected with questionnaires from the United States and Bulgaria and analyzed with hierarchical regression analysis for each country. Results indicated that in the United States referent power base of supervisors and integrating style of handling conflict of subordinates were positively associated with effectiveness. In Bulgaria, legitimate power base of supervisors was positively associated with effectiveness, but the subordinates' conflict styles were not associated with effectiveness.

Keywords: Leader power, conflict styles, satisfactoriness.

Numerous studies have been conducted on power (e. g., Mulder, de Jong, Koppelaar, & Verhage, 1986; Stahelski, Frost, & Patch, 1989; Yuki & Falbe, 1991), conflict (Thomas, 1992; Rahim, 1992), and effectiveness or job performance (Glisson & Durick, 1988; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989; Shore & Martin, 1989; Wright, 1990), but little has been done to investigate the relationships among these constructs. Another issue is that the field studies investigating the relationships of the power bases to individual outcomes had measurement and analytic shortcomings (Podsaroff & Schriesheim, 1985; Rahim, 1986). This study, in an attempt to overcome these limitations, investigated the relationships of the bases of leader power and styles of handling interpersonal conflict with superior to effectiveness of subordinates.

is limited to the influence of one individual (leader) over another individual (follower). Several classifications of leader or supervisory power have been set forth (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Shukla, 1982; Yukl & Falbe, 1991), but the bases of power taxonomy suggested by French and Raven (1959)—coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent—still appears to be fairly representative and popular in application (Cobb, 1980; Frost & Stahelski, 1988; Rahim, 1989). There were attempts to expand this set to included "information" and other power bases, but Gaski (1986) has argued that, "these alleged power sources appear to be already captured by the French and Raven framework ... and has held up well in extensive empirical usage over the years" (pp. 62–63). These power bases are as follows:

Leader Power

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). This definition implies that our research on power

M. Afzalur Rahim is Professor of Management, Western Kentucky University, USA, and the Editor of the *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* and the *International Journal of Conflict Management.*

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Professor M. Afzalur Rahim, Department of Management, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY 42101, USA (tel. +1 270 782-2601, fax +1 270 782-2601, E-mail mgt2000@aol.com).

1. *Coercive power* is based on subordinates' perception that a superior has the ability to punish them if they fail to conform to his or her influence attempt.
2. *Reward power* is based on the perception of subordinates that a superior can reward them for desired behavior.
3. *Legitimate power* is based on the belief of the subordinates that a superior has the right to prescribe and control their behavior.
4. *Expert power* is based on subordinates' belief that a superior has job experience and special knowledge or expertise in a given area.
5. *Referent power* is based on subordinates' interpersonal attraction to and identification with a superior because of their admiration or personal liking of the superior.

Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict

Conflict is defined as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities, i. e., individual, group, organization, etc. There are various styles of behavior by which interpersonal conflict may be handled. Follett (1940) found five ways of dealing with conflict: domination, compromise, integration, avoidance, and suppression. Blake and Mouton (1964) first presented a conceptual scheme for classifying the modes (styles) for handling interpersonal conflicts into five types: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving. Their scheme was reinterpreted by Thomas (1976). He considered the intentions of a party (cooperativeness, i. e., attempting to satisfy the other party's concerns; and assertiveness, i. e., attempting to satisfy one's own concerns) in classifying the modes of handling conflict into five types. Using a conceptualization similar to Blake and Mouton (1964) and Thomas (1976), the *styles* of handling conflict were differentiated on two basic dimensions, concern for self and for others. The first dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person attempts to satisfy his own concern. The second dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person wants to satisfy the concern of others. Studies by Ruble and Thomas (1976) and Van de Vliert and Kabanoff (1990) yielded general support for these dimensions. Combination of the two dimensions results in five specific styles of handling interpersonal conflict (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979, p. 1327).

1. *Integrating Style:* high concern for self and others. This style is also known as problem solving. It involves collaboration between the parties, i. e., openness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach a solution acceptable to both parties.
2. *Obliging Style:* low concern for self and high concern for others. This is also known as accommodating. This style is associated with attempting to play down the differences and emphasizing commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party.
3. *Dominating Style:* high concern for self and low concern for others. This is also known as competing. This style has been identified with win-lose orientation or with forcing behavior to win one's position. A dominating or competing person goes all out to win his or her objective and, as a result, often ignores the needs and expectations of the other party.
4. *Avoiding Style:* low concern for self and others. This is also known as suppression. It has been associated with withdrawal, buckpassing, sidestepping, or "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" situations. It may take the form of postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.
5. *Compromising Style:* intermediate in concern for self and others. It involves give-and-take or sharing whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision. It may mean splitting the difference, exchanging concession, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

Subordinates' Effectiveness

Early studies on French and Raven's power typology frequently touched upon subordinates' effectiveness in relation to the superior's power bases (Bachman, 1968; Bachman, Bowers, & Marcus, 1968; Bachman, Smith, & Slesinger, 1966; Fontaine & Beerman, 1977; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1970; Student, 1968). The consensus among these studies is that subordinates perceive coercive power base as a weak reason for job performance. Reward and legitimate power bases showed no clear relationship with performance. Expert power base and, in most cases, referent power base consistently correlated with performance. This lack of consistent relationships between position power bases and performance may be partly attributed to the measurement and sampling deficiencies of the earlier field studies.

Studies by Dunne, Stahl, and Melhart (1978) and Thamhain and Gemmill (1974) indicate that expertise and formal authority were important reasons for compliance with the instructions of the project managers and that subordinates perceive reward and coercive powers as weak reasons for compliance with the wishes of the superior. Expert and referent and, to some extent, legitimate power bases generally induce both public and private compliance. In a study, Warren (1968) found that the *use* of five types of power by principals was positively associated with total (behavioral and attitudinal) conformity of teachers. The following hypotheses were formulated on the basis of the above literature review.

One would expect the outcomes of interpersonal conflict that fully satisfy the outcomes of both parties to be functional for an organization. A study by Aram, Morgan, and Esbeck (1971) suggested that team collaboration was positively related to satisfaction of individuals' needs, but not to organizational performance. Burke (1970) suggested that, in general, confrontation (integrating) style was related to effective management of conflict and forcing (dominating) and withdrawing (avoiding) were related to the ineffective management of conflict. Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) indicated that integrating style to deal with intergroup conflict was used to a significantly greater degree in higher than lower performing organizations. Likert and Likert (1976) strongly argued and provided some evidence to suggest that an organization which encourages participation and problem solving behaviors attains higher level of effectiveness. Recent studies on integrative style of handling conflict show consistent results. Use of this style results in high joint benefit for the parties, better decisions, and greater satisfaction of the partner (Tutzauer & Roloff, 1988; Wall & Galanes, 1986).

- Hypothesis 1: *Legitimate, expert, and referent power bases are positively associated with effectiveness of subordinates.*
- Hypothesis 2: *Integrating style is positively associated with effectiveness of subordinates.*

Method

Measurement

Leader Power

The five French-Raven bases of supervisory power were measured with the Rahim Leader Power Inventory (RLPI; Rahim, 1988). This instrument contains 29 items to measure the perceptions of subordinates regarding the supervisors' bases of power. Unlike some of the existing instruments on power bases, the RLPI measures performance-contingent coercive and reward power bases. Each item is cast on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = Strongly Agree ... 1 = Strongly Disagree). A higher score indicates a greater base of a supervisor's power.

The instrument was developed on the basis of feedback from respondents and faculty and an iterative process of factor analysis from six successive convenience samples and a random sample of public administrators ($N = 1256$). The final instrument was constructed on the basis of an exploratory factor analysis from a national sample of managers ($N = 476$). The five subscales of the LPI were free from social desirability or response distortion bias. The retest and internal consistency reliabilities range between .82–.93 and .72–.88, respectively (Rahim, 1988).

Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict

These were measured with the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory, Form A (Rahim, 1983). It uses a 5-point Likert scale to measure the five styles of handling interpersonal conflict with superior. An organizational member responds to each of the 28 statements on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = Strongly Agree ... 1 = Strongly Disagree). A higher score represents greater use of a conflict style. The scale has adequate retest and internal consistency reliabilities and construct, convergent, and discriminant validates (Rahim, 1983; Rahim & Magner, 1995).

Effectiveness

This was measured with the Minnesota Satisfactoriness Scales (MSS) (Gibson, Weiss, Dawis, & Lofquist, 1970). The MSS is a 28-item questionnaire designed to be completed by an employee's supervisor. The items are cast on a 3-point Likert scale. The four subscales of the MSS are performance, conformance, dependability, and personal adjustment. The performance subscale measures the subordinate's promotability and the quality and quantity of work. The conformance subscale measures how well the subordinate gets along with the supervisor and coworkers as well as the observance of rules and regulations. The dependability subscale measures the frequency of disciplinary problems created by the subordinate. The personal adjustment subscale measures the subordinate's emotional health or well-being. The four subscales together measure overall performance of a subordinate. Factor analysis of the MSS

items found support for these four independent dimensions. The MSS was developed from supervisor ratings of 2373 workers. The median internal consistency reliability of the subscales was .87 and median retest reliability for several job groups over a 2-year interval was .50.

Table 1

Subscales, means, standard deviations, Cronbach α, and Pearson correlations with effectiveness.

Scale	M	SD	α	r
Coercive Power				
United States	3.84	.64	.73	.07
Bulgaria	3.51	.76	.64	.06
Reward Power				
United States	3.47	.73	.78	.16*
Bulgaria	3.22	.73	.75	-.04
Legitimate Power				
United States	3.95	.47	.69	.15*
Bulgaria	3.53	.55	.64	.22**
Expert Power				
United States	3.61	.72	.86	.29**
Bulgaria	3.50	.90	.84	-.03
Referent Power				
United States	3.82	.75	.87	.21**
Bulgaria	3.51	.73	.64	.01
Integrating				
United States	4.01	.47	.87	.21**
Bulgaria	3.82	.64	.81	.22**
Obliging				
United States	3.56	.44	.70	.14*
Bulgaria	3.16	.75	.76	.01
Dominating				
United States	2.93	.53	.75	.02
Bulgaria	2.93	.65	.69	.07
Avoiding				
United States	2.96	.71	.87	-.001
Bulgaria	3.31	.70	.75	-.03
Compromising				
United States	3.53	.42	.67	.06
Bulgaria	3.54	.58	.68	.21**
Effectiveness				
United States	2.26	.38	.92	–
Bulgaria	2.31	.41	.93	–

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$

Two instruments were prepared which include the above measures. The instrument containing the measures of power and conflict were completed by subordinates and the instrument containing the measure of effectiveness were completed by their respective supervisors.

Sample

Data for this study were collected with the above instruments from a number of organizations in the United States and Bulgaria. The respondents were matched by age groups in two countries. As a result, each country had 202 respondents.

Analysis

Data analysis was performed with the SPSSX computer package.
1. Separate factor analyses of the items for power, conflict, and effectiveness measures were computed for the United States and Bulgaria. This was done to test the construct validity of these measures.
2. Internal consistency reliabilities for the measures were computed with Cronbach α and associations between effectiveness and power and conflict subscales were computed with Pearson correlations.
3. A stepwise hierarchical regression analysis for each country was computed to test the hypotheses. This is needed to compare the results obtained from the United States against Bulgaria. Predictor variables were entered into the regression equation in the following order. In step 1, to control the influence of job-related and demographic variables, such as tenure, organizational level, and education, were entered into each regression equation as a block. In step 2, the five power bases were entered into the equation as a block. In step 3, the five styles were entered into the equation as the final block. In each regression, the dependent variable was effectiveness.

Results

Factor Analysis

The results supported the independent dimensions of power bases, conflict styles, and effectiveness. The subscales of five power bases and five conflict styles were computed by averaging responses of the items to their respective subscales. An overall effectiveness scale was

created by averaging the responses of the 28 items of MSS.

Descriptive Statistics

The means, standard deviations, Pearson correlations between effectiveness and power and conflict subscales, and Cronbach α for the measures are presented in Table 1. The Cronbach α reliabilities were in the low to moderate range.

Regression Analysis

The hierarchical regression analysis for the United States showed that, after removing the effect of covariates—tenure and organizational level—referent power base was positively associated with effectiveness (β = .28, $F[1, 181] = 15.43, p < .001; \Delta R^2 = .074, F[3, 181] = 15.43, p < .005$). Among the five conflict styles, avoiding (β = .23, $F[1, 179] = 8.18, p < .005; \Delta R^2 = .023, F[5, 179] = 4.96, p < .05$) and integrating ($\beta = .18, F[1, 179] = 4.46, p < .05; \Delta R^2 = .021, F[5, 179] = 4.46, p < .05$) were positively associated with effectiveness. Two covariates explained about 5% of the variance in effectiveness.

The hierarchical regression analysis for Bulgaria showed that, after removing the effect of covariate education, legitimate power base was positively associated with effectiveness ($\beta = .23, F[1, 191] = 10.73, p < .005; \Delta R^2 = .052, F[2, 191] = 10.73, p < .005$). The other power bases and conflict styles did not enter into the equations. Covariate education explained about 2% of the variance in effectiveness.

Discussion

No previous study simultaneously examined leader power, styles of handling interpersonal conflict, and performance in a field study. The findings of this basic research will strengthen organization theory relating to power and conflict. The overall implications of the study is that supervisors in the United States can be more effective in increasing their subordinates' effectiveness by enhancing their own referent power base and subordinates' use of integrating style of handling conflict with supervisors. It is not clear why the avoiding conflict style entered into the regression equation; it had nonsignificant Pearson correlation with effectiveness (see Table 1). In Bulgaria, supervisors can enhance their subordinates' effectiveness by increasing their use of legitimate power.

Our findings offer important implications to expatriate managers from the United States who are assigned to work in Eastern European countries. These managers would require education, training, and job experience to gain effectiveness of subordinates from host countries. Expatriate supervisors in Bulgaria may be provided appropriate education and training to overcome deficiency in their legitimate power base. They may also need on-the-job experience to build on this power base.

Three major strengths of the study are that we obtained independent measures of employee effectiveness, matched respondents from the countries on age, and used three published instruments with strong psychometric properties.

References

Aram, J.D., Morgan, C.P., & Esbeck, E.S. (1971). Relationships of collaborative interpersonal relationships to individual satisfaction and organizational performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 16,* 289–296.

Blake, R.R., & Mouton, J.S. (1964). *The managerial grid.* Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing.

Burke, R.J. (1970). Methods of resolving superior-subordinate conflict: The constructive use of subordinate differences and disagreements. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 5,* 393–411.

Bachman, J.G. (1968). Faculty satisfaction and the dean's influence: An organizational study of twelve liberal arts colleges. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 52,* 55–61.

Bachman, J.G. Bowers, D.G., & Marcus, P.M. (1968). Bases of supervisory power: A comparative study in five organizational settings. In A.S. Tannenbaum (Ed.), *Control in organizations* (pp. 229–238). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Bachman, J.G., Smith, C.G., & Slesinger, J.A. (1966). Control, performance, and satisfaction: An analysis of structural and individual effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 4,* 127–136.

Cobb, A.T. (1980). Informal influence in the formal organization: Perceived sources of power among work unit peers. *Academy of Management Journal, 23,* 155–161.

Dunne, E.J., Jr., Stahl, M.J., & Melhart, L.J., Jr. (1978). Influence sources of project and functional managers in matrix organizations. *Academy of Management Journal, 21,* 135–140.

Follett, M.P. (1940). Constructive conflict. In H.C. Metcalf & L. Urwick (Eds.), *Dynamic administration: The collected papers of Mary Parker Follett* (pp. 30–49). New York: Harper & Row. [originally published 1926].

Fontaine, G., & Beerman, J. (1977). Affective consequences of social power: Powerholder and target expectancies associated with different types of power. *Psychological Reports, 40,* 771–774.

French, J.R.P., Jr., & Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in social power* (pp. 150–167). Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research.

Frost, D.E., & Stahelski, A.J. (1988). The systematic measurement of French and Raven's bases of social power in workgroups. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 18*, 375–389.

Gaski, J.F. (1986). Interrelations among a channel entity's power sources: Impact of the exercise of reward and coercion on expert, referent, and legitimate power sources. *Journal of Marketing Research, 18*, 62–77.

Gibson, D.L., Weiss, D.J., Dawis, R.V., & Lofquist, L.H. (1970). *Manual for the Minnesota Satisfactoriness Scales*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.

Glisson, C., & Durick, M. (1988). Predictors of job satisfaction and organizational commitment in human service organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 33*, 61–81.

Ivancevich, J.M., & Donnelly, J.H. (1970). Leader influence and performance. *Personnel Psychology, 23*, 539–549.

Kipnis, D., Schmidt, S.M., & Wilkinson, 1. (1980). Intraorganizational influence tactics: Explorations in getting ones's way. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 65*, 440–452.

Lawrence, P.R., & Lorsch, J.W. (1967). Differentiation and integration in complex organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 12*, 1–47.

Likert, R., & Likert, J.G. (1976). *New ways of managing conflict*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Meyer, J.P., Paunonen, S.V., Gellatly, I.R., Goffin, R.D., & Jackson, D.N. (1989). Organizational commitment and job performance: It's the nature of the commitment that counts. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 74*, 152–156.

Mulder, M., de Jong, R.D., Koppelaar, L., Verhage, J. (1986). Power, situation, and leaders' effectiveness: An organizational field study. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 71*, 566–570.

Podsakoff, P.M., & Schriesheim, C.A. (1985). Field studies of French and Raven's bases of power: Critique, reanalysis, and suggestions for future research. *Psychological Bulletin, 97*, 387–411.

Rahim, M.A. (1983). A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict. *Academy of Management Journal, 26*, 368–376.

Rahim, M.A. (1986). Some psychometric properties of two measures of French and Raven bases of power. *Journal of Psychology, 126*, 79–86.

Rahim, M.A. (1988). The development of a leader power inventory. *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 23*, 491–502.

Rahim, M.A. (1989). Relationships of leader power to compliance and satisfaction with supervision: Evidence from a national sample of managers. *Journal of Management, 15*, 545–576.

Rahim, M.A. (1992). *Managing conflict in organizations* (2nd ed.). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Rahim, M.A., & Bonoma, T.V. (1979). Managing organizational conflict: A model for diagnosis and intervention. *Psychological Reports, 44*, 1323–1344.

Rahim, M.A., & Magner, N.R. (1995). Confirmatory factor analysis of the styles of handling interpersonal conflict: First-order factor model and its invariance across groups. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 80*, 122–132.

Ruble, T.L., & Thomas, K.W. (1976). Support for a two-dimensional model for conflict behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 16*, 143–155.

Shukla, R.K. (1982). Influence of power bases in organizational decision making: A contingency model. *Decision Sciences, 13*, 450–470.

Shore, L.M., & Martin, H.J. (1989). Job satisfaction and organizational commitment in relation to work performance and turnover intentions. *Human Relations, 42*, 625–638.

Stahelski, A.J., Frost, D.E., & Patch, M.E. (1989). Use of socially dependent bases of power: French and Raven's theory applied to workgroup leadership. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 19*, 283–297.

Student, K.R. (1968). Supervisory influence and work-group performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 52*, 188–194.

Thamhain, H.J., & Gemmill, G.R. (1974). Influence styles of project managers: Some project performance correlates. *Academy of Management Journal, 17*, 216–224.

Thomas. K.W. (1976). Conflict and conflict management. In M.D. Dunnette (Ed.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 889–935). Chicago: Rand McNally.

Thomas, K.W. (1992). Conflict and negotiation processes in organizations. In M.D. Dunnette & L.M. Hough (Eds.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (Vol. 3, 2nd ed., pp. 651–717). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Tutzauer, F., & Roloff, E.E. (1988). Communications processes leading to integrative agreements: Three paths to joint benefits. *Communication Research, 15*, 360–380.

Van de Vliert, E., & Kabanoff, B. (1990). Toward theory-based measures of conflict management. *Academy of Management Journal, 33*, 199–209.

Wall, V.D., Jr., & Galanes, G. (1986) The SYMLOG dimensions and small group conflict. *Central States Speech Journal, 37*, 61–78.

Warren, D.I. (1968). Power, visibility, and conformity in formal organizations. *American Sociological Review, 33*, 951–970.

Wright, P.L. (1990). Teller job satisfaction and organization commitment as they relate to career orientations. *Human Relations, 43*, 369–381.

Yukl, G., & Falbe, C.M. (1991). Importance of different power sources in downward and lateral relations. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 76*, 416–423.