

## Leaders' Power and Downward Influence Tactics: The Impact of Power Congruence

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**Abstract:** Congruency has been a central concept in certain fields such as job design work values, organizational goal, and many others. There are a few factors that suggest that agreement between supervisors' and subordinates' are critical determinants of the liking and exchange processes. This research incorporates a basic distinction between the agent and target. Three hundred and eighty-five pairs of Malaysian managers and executives voluntarily participated in this study. The findings suggested that when both supervisors and subordinates were perceived to have position power, the use of hard influence tactics was most apparent and vice versa. Implications of the findings, potential limitations of the study, and directions for future research were discussed further.

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### 1. Introduction

Leadership is a process of interaction between leaders and subordinates where leaders attempt to influence the behavior of their subordinates (Yukl, 2005). Leadership cannot take place without the participation of the subordinates, and power is the essence of leader behavior. Organizational members normally try to influence their peers, supervisors, and subordinates either due to personal factor or their organizational roles. Managers use power to obtain compliance with routine task but obtaining commitment to unusual requests normally requires initiative and extra effort from the target. The impact of a power base may depend on both how it is used and also on the relationship between the power holder and the target. Tjosvold (1995) theorized that managers' use of power and their relationship with their employees strongly affect the dynamics and outcomes of power.

According to previous researchers such as Bergeron, Raymond, and Rivard (2001), congruence is viewed as a pattern of covariation of internal consistency among a set of underlying theoretically related variables. Congruency represents the degree to which two objects are perceived to be similar and it has been suggested as an important factor in the organization of cognition in general (Martin & Stewart, 2001). It has been proven that if an individual sense that others see them congruently, they would know how to act and how their interaction partners would react to them (Polzer, Milton, & Swann, 2002). In addition, congruency is also a key measure that refers to the degree to which two elements are found to be similar for achieving a particular goal. Therefore, when congruence exists, the actual behavior of both dyad members is likely to

align with the expectations and they would tend to interpret behavior similarly.

Power congruence is defined as the compatibility between supervisors and subordinates' power. Douvan and Veroff (1993) have a different opinion with regards to congruence in a relationship. They argued that, persons in a position of greater power have no great need to understand the person who is in a position of lesser power. This implies that subordinate should be more aware of what is going on and be better able to remember and report on his/her interaction with his/her supervisors. According to Berger and Kellner (1964), differences in perceptions in a dyadic relationship decreases as time goes by. Therefore, supervisors/subordinates who accumulate joint experiences learn about each other's idiosyncrasies and should know the exact tactics the other version tends to use whenever he/she wants to realize his/her objectives.

Past research in the management literature on manager-employee attitudinal congruence has generally found that attitude similarity between managers and employees is linked positively to job-related outcomes. What remains unclear is the extent of the common understanding between the supervisors and subordinates' power towards supervisors' choices of influence tactics. To date, the author had failed to detect any references from previous literature on this actual/perceptual congruence between the bases of power of the supervisor and subordinate with regards to the influence tactics. According to Ansari (1990), an agent should not restrict the use of bases of power to a single base since the bases of power and influence strategies do not go hand in hand. This is congruent with the study by French and Raven (1959) which suggested an agent might use several bases of power

in order to exercise a particular set of tactics. Through promoting congruence to the supervisors, it is believed that employees' job satisfaction will improve, thus reducing turnover, and significantly enhance their job performance and commitments.

This study investigates the supervisors' use of influence tactics as rated by subordinates and it attempts to answer the following questions:

- Does the congruence between supervisors' reported subordinates' power and subordinates' reported supervisors' power predict the use of influence tactics?
- Do the congruence between supervisors' self-reported power and subordinates' self-reported power predict the use of influence tactics?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Power

Hollander and Offermann (1990) contended that power in organizations exist together as a result of an individual's position in a time and place and also due to his or her personal qualities. As validated by Bass (1960) and Yukl's (2005) study, each of the power sources can be viewed as two higher-order dimensions known as position or personal power. Position power is defined as having a certain degree of power inherent in its position in the organization, such as legitimate, reward, and coercive power (Bass, 1960; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Yukl, 2005); whereas, personal power refers to the potential influence based on one's expertise, charisma, and approachability such as expert, referent, connection, and information power (Bass, 1960; Yukl, 2005). As noted by Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2002), previous studies have shown that subordinates respond more favorably to personal power rather than positional power, as supervisors who used personal power are more likely to make the target feel useful and appreciated.

As noted by Ragins and Sundstrom (1989), perceptions are important for the development of power because power is basically a matter of perception and besides, perceptions can influence interpersonal expectations and relationships. Vescio, Butz, and Snyder (2003) suggested that powerful people who hold high-power position typically adopt the goals associated with their positions and realize that to achieve those objectives would require the successful influence of subordinates. In view of the above, powerful people should be motivated to influence subordinates in ways that are believed to be effective and further produce positive outcome.

### 2.2 Influence Tactics

Numerous empirical studies in organizational behavior concurred that interpersonal influence in organizations is one of the most

important determinants of managerial effectiveness (Bass, 1990; Fu et al., 2001; Lester, Ready, Hostager, & Bergmann, 2003; Pfeffer, 1992; Yukl & Tracey, 1992). According to Yukl, Falbe, and Youn (1993), the outcome from the use of influence tactics will depend on several variables such as the objective of the influence attempt, the relative power of the agents and targets, the agents and targets relationship, and finally the agents' skill in exercising power.

The bases of power are an important predictor of influence strategies, yet previous researches have focused very little on the relationship between power and influence. It is anticipated that the use of influence strategies would vary as a function of bases of power. Previous researchers (e.g., Ansari, 1990; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1990, Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2002) have found a meaningful relationship between the influence strategies and bases of power. Interestingly, Ansari's findings suggested that bases of power significantly affect the use of both downward and upward influence tactics.

In addition to that, according to Venkatesh, Kohli, and Zaltman (1995), individuals would make greater use of influence tactics that correspond with their particular bases of power, particularly if it helps them to achieve their goals. This is also supported by the study of Spiro and Perrault (1979), where the use of influence was most effective when the influence tactics chosen, were consistent with the bases of power. An experiment done by Aguinis, Nesler, Hosoda, and Tedeschi (1994) showed that managers with a direct or assertive influence style were perceived to have more reward, coercive, expert, and legitimate power, and they were also more credible as compared to managers with an indirect or unassertive style.

### 2.3 Power Congruence

Folk wisdom has it said that "birds of feathers flock together" but also "opposites attract." These proverbs imply that people of similar interest might work well together but dissimilar people might also like one another. Blau (1964) contended that congruence refers to individuals' levels of fulfilled aspirations and expectations from various constructs of the work sphere such as coworkers, supervisors, physical conditions, rewards, career development, or social relations. Congruence represents the degree in which two objects are perceived to be similar and it has been suggested as an important factor in the organization of cognition in general (Martin & Stewart, 2001). Kristof (1996) and Muchinsky and Monahan (1987) revealed that congruence exists when one party, either the individuals or organizations, have something that is valuable to each other, or they share common characteristics.

Phillips (2003) found that congruence can be beneficial for diverse decision-making groups as the absence of congruence may affect individuals' attitudes about the groups' ability to perform.

According to Burns (1978), power is a function of the motives of both the power-holder and the recipient and it is a manifestation of an asymmetry in the relationship between two parties. Past researches have shown that subordinates would more often carry out favors that the managers appreciate and they would prefer to maintain a positive and balance relationship with their supervisors (Ferris, Judge, Rowland, & Fitzgibbons, 1994; Wayne & Liden, 1994). Therefore it suggests that the supervisors' influence tactics might depend on whether the members belong to the same bases of power group as the leaders'.

The study by Jones and Nisbett (1972) evidenced that there is a pervasive tendency for the actors to attribute the cause of their behavior to aspects of the situation, whereas observers are less influenced by the social context as their attention is drawn to the salient characteristics of the actor. In view of this, it is crucial to examine the power of the supervisors or subordinates as perceived by their subordinates or supervisors.

Walker and Zelditch (1993) stressed that the importance of legitimate authority are endorsement and authorization. The study contended that position power of supervisors refer to collective support given to individuals in positions by their subordinates and higher authorities. This means that the subordinates perceptions and endorsement that, the supervisors in the right and proper position are crucial.

Hence, by addressing the effect of individuals' relative power in interaction, one emphasizes the importance of considering self processes in social context (Stryker, 1980). In view of the fact that symbolic interactionism has long been criticized for ignoring power relations in interaction (Cast, 2003), thus, the following hypotheses have been formulated to investigate the congruence of perceived power and its impact on influence tactics.

*H1a. Congruence between supervisors' perception of subordinates' legitimate or coercive power and subordinates' perception of supervisors' legitimate or coercive power is positively related to hard influence tactics.*

*H1b. Congruence between supervisors' perception of subordinates' expert or information power and subordinates' perception of supervisors' expert or information power is positively related to rational influence tactics.*

*H1c. Congruence between supervisors' perception of subordinates' reward, connection, or referent power*

*and subordinates' perception of supervisors' reward, connection, or referent power is positively related to soft influence tactics.*

According to Korsgaard, Meglino, and Lester (2004), allowing employees to rate their own performance would enhance their belief in the fairness of an appraisal system. This indirectly implies that when subordinates were given a chance to assess their own power, this would stimulate greater acceptance of supervisors' influence tactics. Besides, increasing a leader's awareness of how his or her own perceptions as compared to the subordinate's perceptions can lead to greater agreement (London & Wohlers, 1991). As such, the impact of actual congruence on bases of power between supervisors and subordinates warrants attention. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

*H2a. Congruence between supervisors' self-reported legitimate or coercive power and subordinates' self-reported legitimate or coercive power is positively related to hard influence tactics.*

*H2b. Congruence between supervisors' self-reported expert or information power and subordinates' self-reported expert or information power is positively related to rational influence tactics.*

*H2c. Congruence between supervisors' self-reported reward, connection, or referent power and subordinates' self-reported reward, connection, or referent power is positively related to soft influence tactics.*

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Samples and Procedure

The data has been collected from the targeted respondents working in large scale manufacturing companies through survey questionnaires. The target respondents comprised of subordinates who were working executives and their immediate supervisors who were lower and middle level managers. A total number of questionnaires disseminated were 1300 sets, nevertheless, only 385 sets were useable. The questionnaires given to the subordinates were a parallel version of the managers' questionnaires on the power bases, with only minor differences in wording. The subordinates' questionnaires would be matched with agents' questionnaires through a common code number. A total of 204 (53%) respondents were working in an industrial sector, while others were working in consumer sector 125 (32.5%), and construction sector 56 (14.5%). Out of these companies, most were local based 244 (63.4%), followed by American based 79 (20.5%), Japanese based 28 (7.3%), European based 9 (2.3%), and others 25 (6.5%) such as Singaporean

based, Korean based, and Thailand based. In addition, 189 (49.2%) of them represented the lower level of management, while 130 (33.9%) were from middle level of management.

**3.2 Measures**

On the basis of previous theory (Ansari, 1990; Bhal & Ansari, 2000; French & Raven, 1959; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1983; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989; Yukl & Falbe, 1990) a pool of power and influence tactics typically shown in organizational settings were generated. This study adopted the Hinkin et al.'s (1989) method to measure the five bases of power because of the conceptual consistency underlying the definitions that were used in its development and also it was proven to have adequate psychometric properties. In addition, the items for another two power bases, namely information and connection, were adapted from the work by Ansari (1990) and Bhal and Ansari (2000). For the purpose of this study, the seven bases of power were further grouped under position and personal power. As for influence tactics, a commercial modified version by Kipnis and Schmidt (1983) known as the Profile of Organizational Influence strategies (POIS) was used.

Data were analyzed using *Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 13.0* for Microsoft windows. The data were analyzed as follows. Firstly, the demographic profile of both the supervisors and subordinates were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Secondly, factor analysis and

reliabilities testing were used to determine the goodness of measures. Lastly, the hierarchical multiple regression analysis was applied to examine the effects of various perspectives of power bases on supervisors' influence tactics.

The 35 items in the power bases scale and 44 items in the influence scale were factor analyzed. After deleting items with multiple loadings and items which were not theoretically meaningful, the extracted factors were left with 25 and 28 items respectively.

Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) revealed that, the relationship between gender and power was both longitudinal and developmental; thus, it was misleading to study male-female differences at a single point in time as the groups are not comparable. Thus, gender was statistically controlled for in this study to ensure cleaner and stronger findings.

The score means, standard deviations, correlations among the study variables, and reliability results are shown in table 1. As presented in the table, the standard deviations of the variables were near to or greater than 1.0, indicating that the study variables were discriminatory. The table has also shown that a number of the predictor variables were significantly correlated to the criterion variables. Most of the correlations were ranging from low to substantial (.14 to .52). The internal reliability scales were between .79 and .93, exceeding the recommended value of .60 (Nunnally, 1978) and thus clearly acceptable.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Zero-order Correlations and Cronbach's Coefficients Alpha among Study Variables

Factors	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Control Variable	-	-								
1 Gender			<b>SIM</b>							
Predictor Variables										
2 Pos_ml	4.30	.88	-.05	<b>.83</b>						
3 Per_ml	5.09	.93	-.06	32**	<b>.93</b>					
4 Pos_lm	3.89	.94	.01	14**	.01	<b>.87</b>				
5 Per_lm	5.08	.85	-.06	12*	30**	26**	<b>.93</b>			
Criterion Variables										
6 Hard Tactics	3.26	1.23	.03	31**	-27**	23**	-.07	<b>.88</b>		
7 Rational Tactics	4.50	.80	-.01	36**	52**	.08	16**	21**	<b>.79</b>	
8 Soft Tactics	4.06	1.08	.10	33**	37**	21**	26**	18**	51**	<b>.91</b>
No. of items	-	-	1	12	13	12	13	7	10	11

Note: N=385 pairs; \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; Diagonal entries in bold indicate Cronbach's coefficients alpha; Decimals for Pearson correlations are omitted; SIM=Single item measure; Pos=Position power; Per=Personal power; ml=subordinate reports supervisor ; lm=supervisor reports subordinate

Three sets of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted separately for each of the criterion variables namely, hard, rational,

and soft tactics. These analyses were carried out in three steps and were presented in table 2.

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Results: The Relationship between Bases of Power and Influence Tactics

Criterion Variables	Hard Tactics			Rational Tactics			Soft Tactics		
	Std Beta (Model 1)	Std Beta (Model 2)	Std Beta (Model 3)	Std Beta (Model 1)	Std Beta (Model 2)	Std Beta (Model 3)	Std Beta (Model 1)	Std Beta (Model 2)	Std Beta (Model 3)
<u>Control Variables</u> Gender	.10	.08	.07	.00	.04	.04	.02	.05	.07
<u>Predictor Variables</u> Pos_ml Per_ml Pos_lm Per_lm		.34** -.30** .17** -.06	-.53 .01 -.72* -.53		.17** .51** -.05 .06	-.07 1.28* -.18 -.42		.12* .33** .09 .17**	-.66* 1.54* .42 .66
<u>Interaction terms</u> lm*mlpo lm*mlper ll*mmmpo ll*mmper			.88* .17 -.29 -.08			-.19 .06 -.35 .56			-.58 -.72 -.08 1.61*
Adjusted $R^2$	-.01	.41	.45	-.00	.35	.34	-.00	.32	.36
$R^2$ change	.01	.41	.07	.00	.37	.02	.00	.34	.06
$F$	3.10	26.79**	3.19**	.00	21.77**	.81	.08	19.26**	2.58**

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $< .01$ .

### 3.3 Hard Tactics

The model for hard tactics was found to be significant ( $F = 3.19$ ,  $p < .01$ ). On the basis of the underlined indicators, no multicollinearity problem was present. The assumption for homogeneity and linearity were also complied. A total of three predictor variables were found to have significant contribution to the variance explained. Only one of the interaction terms was statistically significant. This result suggested that supervisors would more often use hard tactics when they themselves and their subordinates possessed position power.

#### *Rational Tactics*

The ANOVA table revealed that the model as whole was not significant. However, step 2 was found to be significant ( $F = 21.77$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Hence the direct effects of the predictors especially the perceived position and personal power of the supervisors were the significant contributors to rational tactics. This indicated that supervisors would more often resort to the use of rational tactics when they were perceived by subordinates as having both position and personal power.

### 3.4 Soft Tactics

The resultant model ( $F = 2.58$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was found to be statistically significant. The condition indexes, VIF, and tolerance were found to be within acceptable level, thus ruling out the potential problem of multicollinearity. One of the interaction terms showed significant result on soft tactics. Thus, this

implied that the impact on the use of soft influence tactics was most appropriate when both supervisors and subordinates were perceived to have personal power.

The graph portrayed in Figure 1 illustrated the effect of congruence between the position power of supervisors and subordinates as perceived by one another. From Figure 1, it can be observed that when supervisors perceived subordinates as having low to moderate position power, the use of hard influence tactics rose sharply regardless of the level of supervisors' position power as perceived by their subordinates. In contrast, when supervisors perceived their subordinates as possessing moderate to high position power, the use of hard influence tactics reduced marginally while subordinates perceived supervisors as dominating moderate to high position power. Comparatively, the negative impact of supervisors low position power was more pronounced on supervisors' use of hard influence tactics.

This can be interpreted that, the significant interaction between supervisors and subordinates perceived position power would result in more often the use of hard tactics, only if subordinates were found to have low to moderate position power ( $\beta = 1.00$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

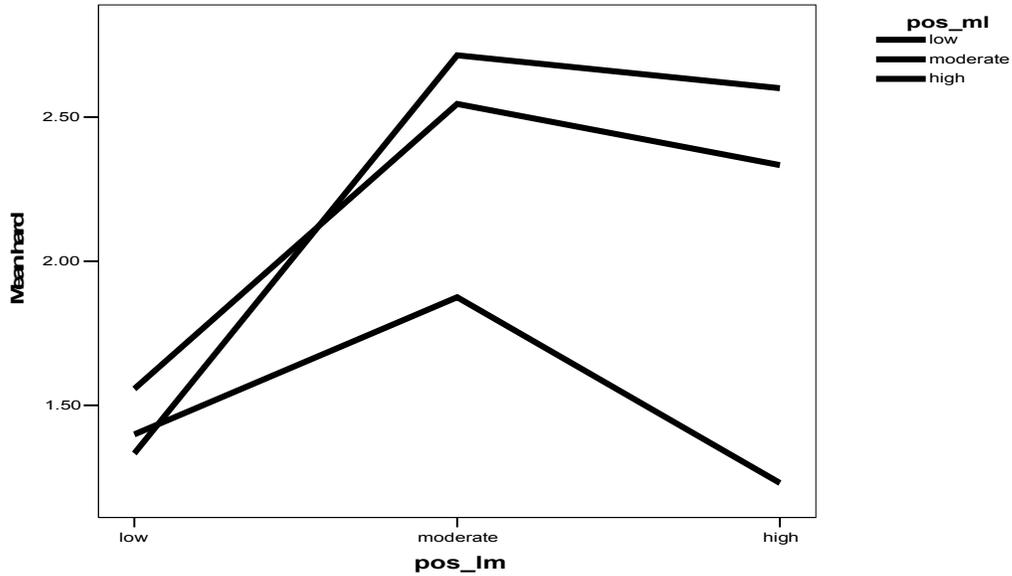


Figure 1. Interaction between Supervisors’ and Subordinates’ Perceived of Position Power for Hard Tactics

As illustrated in Figure 2, when subordinates’ perceived themselves as having low and high personal power, then only would the supervisors used soft tactics if at the same time, the supervisors self perception of personal power level reached moderate and beyond. The pattern of the subordinates’ moderate personal power seems to be the opposite of

the low and high subordinates’ personal power. Supervisors would more often used soft tactics when they perceived themselves as having low to moderate personal power while subordinates possessed moderate personal power. The situation became noticeably negative when the level of supervisors’ personal power level reached moderate to high.

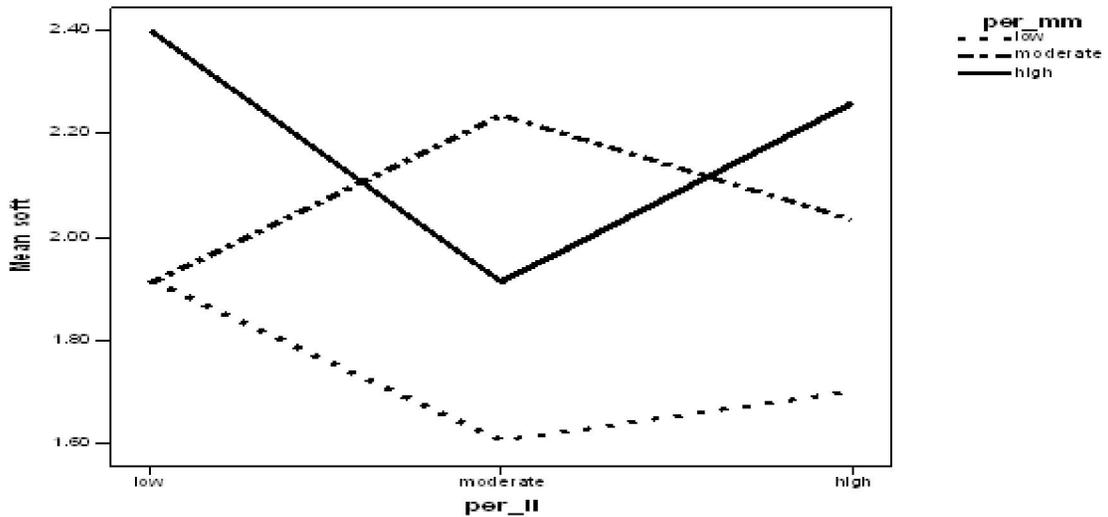


Figure 2. Interaction between Supervisors and Subordinates Personal Power for Soft Influence Tactics

**4. Discussion**

The present study was conducted with two-fold objectives in mind. First was to examine the relationships between the power bases and influence tactics, and second, to investigate the extent power

congruence between the supervisor and subordinate, and its impact on the use of influence tactics.

The correlations between power bases and the three influence tactics were noteworthy. Most of the possession of perceived personal and position

power by the supervisors or subordinates were significantly related to hard, rational, and soft tactics, suggesting that either the supervisors or subordinates possess of position or personal power, supervisors will use various influence tactics depending on the situation. The result was congruent with Turner (2005) where people influence and control others through persuasion, authority, and coercion. As noted by Emans, Munduate, and Van de Vliert (2003), forcing tactics are effective when it is combined with non-forcing tactics.

The hierarchical regression results interestingly revealed that when both supervisors and subordinates were perceived to have position power, the use of hard influence tactics was most apparent. It is consistent with previous work by Tosi (1973) that, an authoritarian subordinate was best paired with a directive boss. Halverson (2004) revealed that leaders should exert hard influence tactics on followers' because of their level of status. If attention were paid to the person's affective state it would lead to emotional contagion. As noted by Greiner (1986), if subordinates retained a great deal of formal authority, the supervisors would hold ambivalent attitudes toward asserting influence. This was further supported by Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2002) and Tjosvold (1995) who stated that, supervisors chose to use hard tactics to influence the perceived high-powered subordinates, because they felt could pose as potential threats to them.

Conversely, when both of them were seen to have personal power, supervisors would resort to the use of soft influence tactics. The rationale behind this was that the hard influence tactics might be viewed as harmful in terms of establishing a sense of obligation (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1990). Supervisors might choose a soft or rational tactics to influence the low-powered subordinates who knew themselves to be so, thus there is no need for the supervisors to impose strict rules on them. According to Stahelski and Paynton (1995), supervisors need not apply hard tactics to influence the subordinates' perceived personal power, but instead softer tactics would be used, as the subordinates did not have the capability to challenge their supervisors.

### 5. Limitations and Implications

As in any other studies, the design of this study posed few limitations. First, the study relied primarily on sample drawn from manufacturing sector, thus the findings cannot be generalized to other sectors. Secondly, this study was not longitudinal where cross-sectional studies would only provide a static perspective on fit

Despite these limitations, the current findings added to an understanding of power

congruence and influence in leadership. While previous theory has suggested that power has a direct impact on the influence tactics, the current study tested this hypothesis in a compatible manner. This study established that power congruence would have an impact on the supervisors' use of influence tactics. In the same vein, this study added breadth to the research stream by demonstrating that subordinates' power play a substantial role in affecting their superiors' use of various types of influence tactics.

Our study has contributed to the importance of congruence theory, yet future endeavors should be dedicated to comparing these findings with similar predictors and criterion in other sector. All in all, this study suggests that fit and expectations should be taken more seriously by managers in the manufacturing sector on account of their influential and important role to inspire their employees, and to be used as a means to increase one's career satisfaction or multiple aspects of organizational performance.

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