

# The Effects of Social Power Bases within Varying Organizational Cultures

by

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## Abstract

This study focuses on social power in the context of organizational culture and how this relationship impacts outcomes of follower compliance and trust. Power is the ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or a course of events (Handgraaf, et al., 2008). There are six different types of social power, including informational, referent, legitimate, coercive, rewarding, and expert (Fontaine & Beerman, 1977). Each type of social power may lead to varying psychological outcomes, such as compliance, satisfaction, and agreement. To date, the empirical literature has not fully addressed the issue of whether one type of power is more effective than the others in different organizational cultural contexts. The present research examined the effectiveness of four types of social power in varying organizational cultural contexts (i.e., hierarchy and adhocracy) for eliciting follower compliance and trust (Tharp, 2009). The methodology employed videos which manipulated the types of power and culture to examine their impact on followers. Followers were asked to what extent they would comply with the leader and how much they trusted the leader. Findings provided partial support for three of the eight hypotheses for total compliance and total trust scale responses, although none of the findings for MANOVA, ANOVA and T-tests were statistically significant. Coercive power demonstrated high compliance and trust outcomes for the average scale score, but reward power within an adhocracy culture demonstrated low compliance and trust outcomes.

Results are discussed in terms of potential confounders, possible attributional influences, and the implications for other organizational outcomes including commitment.