

# Subordinates Response to Their Leaders Influence and Power: A Case Study of a Property Market Agency

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**Abstract** The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership influence and power on its followers in the Malaysian property market. The study looks in depth from the perspective of subordinates on the issue of their perception on their leaders that can direct them towards commitment and loyalty to their organisation. Due to the nature of property consultants' work where they are always on-the-go of which it involves meeting clients, property viewing and closing deal at most of the times, the written questionnaires were most suitable measurement for them instead of face-to-face interview. Five respondents were chosen who were based in a property company in Klang Valley. Based on the collected data, all respondents fully agreed that they have a close relationship with the leader was perceived to use their power and influence upon the subordinates. Future studies should also consider alternative modes of inquires such as employing the longitudinal method of data collection design. Deductive methodology approach on other industries such as manufacturing, education or food and service industry in Malaysia were also recommended.

**Keywords** Leader, property market, Malaysia, Qualitative research, Commitment

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## 1. Introduction

The property market industry in Malaysia is represented by more than 900 firms and employed about 9,000 consultants. The industry in the past have been attractive especially there are positive perceptions of the public on the industry. According to a report the industry will grow next year with an increase of at least 3 % in property price. This would mean that the consultants will be receiving a higher commission. However, there is a great competition among the property firms in getting the best consultants to work for them. Therefore employees' commitment and loyalty are important factors in this profession which would result in company's sustainability and profitability. However, commitment and loyalty alone will not be sufficed to ensure the company goals are being fulfilled. There is a need of leadership that would often seen as agents of change of the status quo and through their shared vision and values with their subordinates, developmental and organizational growth will be facilitated [7]. They must have the attributes of a great leader; the power and influence create subordinate loyalty and being inspired in meeting organization's goals. Past study Shackleton's [23] study conferred that there are two important critical factors when making an enquiring

on leadership in organisation is their power and influence strength.

Past studies [3]; [15] and [16] were on agreement that power can be defined as the ability of an individual to have an influence on another person/s, group of people, or a division to perform some kind of activities as desired. McShane and Glinow [15] however conjured that by having power it does not mean that an individual can change someone's attitudes or behaviour to conform to the requirement but rather the possibility to do so only in future. This may depends on the strength of power and the responsive of the other party. Influence however is more related to a process, to get other people engaged to an activity that might not be in the first place is important to them. However, sometimes power and influence is being interchangeably used in management.

It cannot be denied that organisation need to build its employee commitment and loyalty strength through having leaders that have a strong will influence but the question, "is this significant in the property market"? Despite there is copious literature on leadership, the knowledge on the leadership implication on employees work routine in the property market as a distinct phenomenon remains rather scare. Thus, the objective of this research is not to test any hypothesis rather to investigate into the phenomena of a leader's influence on its employee in the property market context. We hope that by our examining these phenomena, it will assist the leaders of the Malaysian property market as employers to realize the contributions of their employees. If

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this becomes a reality, there is a possibility leadership skills can be enhanced for the future growth of the industry. It is expected that the findings of this research could also endowed constructive information to property industry leaders to efficiently and effectively manage their organisation. Additionally, from the research there is a possibility that those leaders will be able to interpret, develop and realize how importance is their ability to influence members of the organization to work along with them, hand in hand making a great success.

## 2. Literature Review

Leadership studies in the past have defined leadership as their power to influence people to accomplish organization objectives. This is supported by Braynion [6] arguments that leaders have the power to influence their followers to meet the organizational goals. Therefore, "leaders inherit a responsibility to model desired behaviour not only for the benefit of the organization, but also for the benefit of those they supervise" [20]. Scarnati [20] attributed leaders as a role model and has the ability to coach and mentor their subordinates while also taking risk, trustworthy, having positive attitude while confident in making decision and having self control. Politis [18] argued that power and influence of leaders will have an impact in controlling individuals and divisions in any organization. Lile [11] found that when there are some sort of collaboration between two or more person in an organisation, there were bound to be some form of power and influence that exist between them and this contribute to the contemporary leadership effectiveness. The significance of power and influence in the eyes of today's leaders will basically depends on how they interpret both components in achieving the organization's objectives. Past studies was mostly done in various industries and context and it will be interesting to find out in how the followers in the property business perceived their leaders power and influence on then.

It has been seen in the past that successful organisations, are driven by competent leaders applying the different facets of power. Though power has been defined by all researchers in as the ability of an individual to influence other parties which may be an individual, group of people, or a division to carry out certain activities, however, it is important to comprehend that power has the probable influence to transform someone's attitudes or behaviour [15]. However it is said that the more power the leaders is able to possess, the higher the likelihood to gain trust from their supporters. Without power, the ability of a leader to influence others will be not be fruitful. Consequently, leaders that use their power in controlling their followers must be mindful that they may get resistance or otherwise in a more possible manner, they may get full commitment and compliance [4].

On the other hand, successful leadership has a role of influence in their portfolio. As such, they should have skills in buying in their followers to accomplish their tasks

effectively [10]. Leaders with influence skill, will face no problem to get subordinates their subordinates to follow company policy and procedure aligning to the organisational goals. Past study by Rost [19] defined influence as "an interactive process in which people attempt to convince other people to believe and / or act in certain ways". Manning [14] on the other hand, argued those influencers are when they get people to do things in a way that they wish to. Kaufman [10] conjured the six principles of influence that support earlier study by Robert Cialdini: reciprocation; commitment and consistency; social validation; liking; authority; and scarcity. Therefore, leaders need to be thoughtful on the concept of influence that allows them to manage organisations successful.

Power and influence in the past have associate with autocratic or dictatorial leadership style that sometimes yield unpleasant situation to followers. Thus, it is important that leaders and its followers of the organizations should understand the concept of power and influence in organization for the purpose of building the company competitive advantage over others in its own industry.

## 3. Methodology

This study was based on a single case study that explores a phenomenon. This case study was bounded with a purpose to understand the group understudy [21] [22] as well as limiting to a single instrumental case study where researcher will only pay attention to a problem or apprehension [22]. The sample chosen was purposive sampling where the researcher has the flexibility in selecting cases that indicate a different dimension on the problem at hand [22]. The sample included property consultants who have working experience of more than a year. The respondent were intentionally selected that fit into the criteria so that they may have already deeply involved in the business as well as in contacts with their leaders. Phenomenological study such as this nature should have a sample of between three to ten respondent [22]. As in this case five respondents were chosen who were based in a property company in Klang Valley. Due to the nature of their work where they are always on-the-go as their nature of work involve meeting clients, property viewing and closing deal at most of the times, the written questionnaires are most appropriate instead of face-to-face interview. Therefore the researcher decided on self-administered written questionnaires to be given individually with the intention to evaluate the respondents' response towards the power and influence concept in leadership, particularly how they feel about being monitored and controlled by their leaders. A set of written questionnaires with open-ended questions is the best solution for collecting data from the respondent which is specially designed for the subordinates in order to avoid disrupting their busy routine in sales. An open-ended question is designed to encourage a full, meaningful answer using the respondent's own knowledge or feelings. This was structured such so that it will be more objective and will

cause less bias as in contrast to closed-ended question that encourages a short or single-word answer.

The respondents were given five working days to answer the questionnaires at their own convenient time and place with no supervision from the researcher. The questionnaires were collected back from the agency administrator who assisted in compiling all the questionnaires from the respondents. For the data analysis process, Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was conducted where the collected data were coded and themes were developed. According to Burnard et al. (2008) TCA involves the process of analysing transcripts, identifying themes within the data and gathering together examples of those themes from the text. The five stages processes as recommended by Burnard et al. (2008) were adhered. The data process was done manually and the interviewer was required to go through the data rigorously in order to comprehend each data and thus avoiding any misinterpretation.

#### 4. Findings

With regards to the kind of leadership styles that was implemented, out of five respondents, two respondents agreed that their top management portrayed transformational leadership style, whereas the other two respondents believed their leaders were practicing transactional leadership. Only one respondent did response that the leaders were practicing both transactional and transformational type of leadership at the same time.

From the data, it is obvious that two respondents believed power of a leader means the ability of a leader to convince and influence others. The rest of the respondents think that leader's power is either delegation of tasks for subordinates, leading and directing capability or the ability to inspire others. Majority of the respondent felt that their leaders have power ability rating at 4/5 while one of them think their leaders rating at 3/5; in which score 1 means weak and score 5 means the leader has a great ability in practicing power over the subordinates. From bases of power perspective, four respondents agreed that top management power base is more into reward power rather than expert and referent power. Two out of five respondents agreed that leaders should have full power over their subordinates with a condition that it shall depend on the situation or subordinates' attitudes as well as to be practiced professionally without any emotional attachment. However, three respondents disagreed with the motion. Despite the disagreement between the respondents whether leaders should possess full power over the subordinates, all of them believe that their leaders are permissible to practice their power towards subordinates in certain conditions such as during dispute over work-related matters, when making a decision, in a situation where subordinates perform badly or subordinates decision contradict with the company goals. Three out of five negotiators agreed that they have not being controlled or monitored closely by the leaders while the other two

suggested that they were closely monitored. Data on subordinates' acceptance of leaders power shows that four subordinates could accept the situation as long as the subordinates will never be humiliated, as well as leaders are fully aware that they are taking the right actions in logical, professional and proper way without prejudice. By taking into accounts their early responses, four respondents believe their top management shall improve the way they are using their power over the subordinates in the company.

In terms of leaders' influence, four respondents were fully agreed that influence is a change of someone's attitudes, values, beliefs or behaviours. According to the data, three respondents mentioned that their leaders are using rational persuasion as their influence tactic, two negotiators selected inspirational appeals, while consultation tactic and reward system scored one each. Four respondents fully believed that their leaders' influence could benefit the subordinates, whereas one respondent was partially agreed. Data collection suggests that leaders are required to practice their influence over the subordinates only in a few conditions i.e. when subordinates have lack of product knowledge, slow progress in subordinates performance, disciplinary issue exist, when subordinates unable to solve problems, and in a situation where the subordinates and company goals need to be aligned. Out of five respondents, only one person mentioned that top management in the company are not necessary to improve themselves in terms of influencing the subordinates.

On the importance of leaders' power and influence, five questions were asked. Three respondents agreed that power and influence are very important for leaders to practice in the company. In terms of total freedom given to subordinates in carrying out their work routine, three respondents disagreed with the motion while the rest did agree in their answers. However when asked whether leaders will have the ability to control their subordinates without possessing any power and influence skills, all respondents agreed that leaders will definitely fail to control the situation. When we asked the respondents to list down pros and cons for leaders to maintain their power and influence skills, each respondent did provide their individual answers except for one respondent. Based on the data, from positive aspect, leaders shall maintain their power and influence skills in order to provide good directions for subordinates, to maintain good relationship of leader-follower, ability to enhance team work, assist subordinates to work in a stable environment, and finally personal goals and company goals will be set in a same direction. However from negative point of view, the respondents believed that such power and influence will initiate less freedom for subordinates in decision making, subordinates will be reluctant to venture into new ideas due to being under total control, possibility of dispute between top management and the subordinates cause by different ideas as well as fear to speak-up.

Last section in the written questionnaires highlighted the way they response to the top management power and influence skills imposed over them throughout the years. Based on the collected data, all respondents fully agreed that

they have a close relationship with the leaders as well as agreed for the leaders to use their power and influence upon the subordinates. Out of five respondents, one partially agreed that being controlled and monitored by the leaders benefitted the subordinates, the rest agreed with the motion. Three respondents felt that when top management use their power and influence over the subordinates, this will push the subordinates to the next level, other than guiding the subordinates as well as help to improve their performance in order to achieve targeted goals. Last responses received for this section implied that three out of five respondents prefer to work under a leader who believes power and influence is the best approach to manage a business successfully.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

To make the desired changes a cordial relationship between leaders and followers is important and most importantly how they understood their interdependency [5]; [2] and [17]. The finding from this research had confirmed this relationship. The property agents felt the relationships were more on a friendly platform but they still keep their professionalism apart without ignoring the fact that leaders are still the most powerful person in an organisation. This finding supports the view of interdependency and reciprocity between leaders and followers are important supporting leadership process that happens between people [2]. This study shows the link between leaders and followers as essential, and thoughts about leadership without thinking followership will be a grave mistake.

In order to fill the gap in linking leaders to the followers, we are suggesting: effective two-ways communication between leaders and followers; leaders to be fair in making their decision by balancing their approach i.e focusing on both hard and lenient way to manage the subordinates; minimum supervision but constantly and finally encouragement and motivating the subordinates for continuous improvements. Our finding did support past study by Kaufman [10] wherein the researcher deemed to accept the idea that leaders to be more flexible when managing their workforce. Apart from flexibility, Kaufman [10] agreed a leader should have the ability to listen, honest, being visible, approachable and having a vision. Future studies should also consider alternative modes of enquires such as employing the longitudinal method of data collection design or deductive methodology approach and other industries such as manufacturing, education or food and service industry in Malaysia.

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