

Supervisor-supervisee Guanxi and Power-dependence: Conceptual Frameworks, Narrative Application, and Future Directions

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Abstract

Comparing Emerson's view of power-dependence relationships and supervisor-supervisee's guanxi theory, this paper focuses on knowing how power-dependence dynamics differ between shouren guanxi-based relationships and Emerson's framework of power-dependence model in professional environments. Narrative interviews from employees about their oral history using theory-based sample from interviews in South Asia and Southern Europe in various sectors. Focus was kept on significant micro-events with their supervisor for the participants. The stories, narrative segments, patterns of meaning around events, themes and epiphanies aided final interpretation of the story. The collected stories are currently being analyzed. We expect the results to suggest that despite appearances of dissimilarities between the two frameworks, shouren guanxi prevails in Southern European contexts too – albeit hidden. We expect that South Asian contexts would prize shouren guanxi, particularly saving face (maizen) and hierarchical reciprocity. Results are expected to support resource dependence on the supervisor. The study is of value to social exchange theorists – both Western and Eastern, and managers in MNCs who wish to successfully navigate an increasingly multicultural workforce. In addition, this study highlights overlaps between Western and Eastern deference relationships at workplace and suggests future directions.

Keywords: Deference; Microevents-Events; Multicultural Workforce; Narrative Interviews; Shouren