

Gaining influence over others does not increase autonomy

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Moving up the greasy pole in the office does not make people feel more personally free, new research has shown.

The research, from the University of Kent, looked at whether exercising influence over others in [social situations](#), such as at work, leads to a greater sense of personal freedom or 'autonomy'.

The study found that there was no correlation between elevated social influence, or [power](#) and elevated personal freedom, suggesting that the relationship between influence and autonomy diminishes with increasing levels of power.

However, the research, by Dr Mario Weick and Stefan Leach of the University's School of Psychology and Dr Joris Lammers from the University of Cologne, Germany, did find that a lack of personal power correlates with a lack of social power.

In one study 800 people from the US, UK, Germany and India were asked to recall events they thought of as either high or low in influence and high or low in autonomy. The researchers then asked participants how influential and autonomous they felt in these situations.

A second study, asking 200 people to report how much influence and autonomy they experience in their everyday lives, confirmed that the relationship between influence and autonomy grows weaker with increasing levels of power.

The research suggests that gaining influence over people does not lead to increased personal [autonomy](#). Among the reasons for this, the researchers suggest, is that with every gain in discretionary abilities and control, for instance at work, individuals also gain additional responsibilities and often face an increase in scrutiny.

More information: Stefan Leach et al, Does influence beget autonomy? Clarifying the relationship between social and personal power, *Journal of Theoretical Social Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1002/jts5.5](#)

Provided by University of Kent

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