SOCIAL POWER IN INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses itself to two basic questions: (a) What do the organizational members mean when they speak of power? (b) What are the common power strategies being adopted in Indian organizations?

That A has power over B, or A has more power than B is one of the most noticeable facts of organizational life. Weber viewed power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance ..." (1947, p. 152). According to Dahl (1957), "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (pp. 202-203). And for Emerson (1962, p. 32), "the power of actor A over actor B is the amount of resistance on the part of B which can be potentially overcome by A." French and Raven (1959) conceptualized power as a "potential influence," and Khandwalla (1977) viewed it as "the ability to secure one's goals through the explicit or implicit use of force" (pp. 52-53). Most researchers agree that power is the ability or *poten*tial to influence others. Thus, the first objective of this study is to find out *what the organizational members mean when they speak of power.*

How is power exercised? We know very little about how people actually exercise influence, or what behavioral strategies they adopt to influence others in order to fulfill one's ends. According to Kipnis and Schmidt (1983), the distinction between resources (or bases) and behavioral strategies has not been made explicit. Instead, an implicit assumption has developed that bases of power and power strategies go hand in hand (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1973)--that is, negative sanctions (such as threats or demotions) are used when the base of power is coercive and that positive sanctions (such as promotions or pay-raises) are used when the base of power is rewards. This assumption may be incorrect (Kipnis and Schmidt, 1983). In fact, several studies (e.g.,

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Goodchilds, Quadrado, & Raven, 1975; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980) revealed that people do not use all of the behavioral strategies described by the bases of power schemes (French & Raven, 1959; Kelman, 1958). Thus, the second objective of this study is *to derive a more inclusive conceptualization of behavioral strategies through the application of the critical incident methodology.*

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

The study concerns about 10 non-similar organizations in Northern India. The points of difference between them lie mainly in (a) the production process, (b) the source of capital investment, (c) the size (numerical strength), and (d) the geographical location. Altogether 137 managerial and non-managerial personnel from these organizations participated in the study.

All participants were males, about 25 per cent of them were engineers and the remaining were holding teaching, administrative, or management positions; about 40 percent were at supervisory and low levels of management and the remaining at the middle and top levels of management.

The average age of the respondents was about 42 years, and the mean company tenure was about 15 years. Only those participants were selected who had at least 5 subordinates directly under them. They were interviewed individually and in private and were assured of the complete confidentiality of their individual responses, and the importance of frank and sincere replies was emphasized.   .

Tools Used

An in-depth interview lasting for about 45 minutes was conducted with each participant. The following two questions were put to the respondents:

(i) *In the study of organization, one hears a lot about "power." Now this is a pretty broad term, but I am interested in trying to pin down the meaning of this word. What is your definition of this word? Or, what does power mean to you?*

(ii) *Recall a "difficult-to-manage" situation in the immediate past involving your subordinate (s), and describe how you handled (or managed) the situation. Tell me exactly what happened.*

Descriptive information such as respondents' age, tenure, span of control, job title, levels in the organization, etc. were gathered with the help of a personal data blank.

RESULTS

After going through all the interview protocols, a coding system was developed and the inter-coder reliability was tried out on a small sample of 15 cases. In order to resolve any discrepancies, new categories were developed which all classifiers believed to be appropriate. The inter-coder reliabilities, following the method suggested in Budd, Thorp, and Donohew (1967, p. 68) for the two contents--meaning of power and behavioral strategies--were found to be .889 and .929, respectively, with an average correlation of .909. Responses that were unintelligible or inappropriate for study were not included in this analysis.

Meaning of Power

As mentioned earlier, no definition was given to the respondents; instead, they were asked to provide a definition of power. Table 1 provides the eight categories of the definition of power mentioned most frequently by each of the four groups of respondents. It is evident from Table 1 that there is a fairly close agreement ($W = .64$, $\chi^2 = 17.92$, $df = 7$, $p < .02$) between the four groups of respondents on various categories of definitions provided by them. On the whole, the respondents viewed power as the *ability* or *potentiality* of an individual to "get work done," to "influence" to "control and change others' behavior," to "do things according to likes and dislikes," or to "reward and punish others." While the first category points to the *Kursi*, i.e., "authority and position," the fourth and last categories paradoxically are directed towards "possession of resources" and "misuses of power" (i.e., the other side of the coin).

Behavioral Strategies

Several authors (e.g., Burns, 1961; Pettigrew, 1973) have noted that the term "strategies" may be sensitive for use in direct investigations. So in this study, the respondents were asked first to recall the "difficult-to-manage" situation in the immediate past involving their subordinates and then to describe how they managed (or handled) the situation. Table 2 shows the most frequently mentioned ways of handling the difficult situations by each of the four groups of respondents. Results reveal that there is a clear agreement ($W = .57$, $\chi^2 = 27.31$, $df = 12$, $p < .01$) between the four groups of respondents on the various strategies reported by them. The first six strategies (see Table 2) are examined in detail below.

Sanctions. This strategy, identified by over 25 per cent of the respondents, involves the use of organizationally derived rewards (e.g., pay raise, promotion, overtime benefits, etc.) and punishments (e.g., demotion, transfer, etc.). It is apparent from the findings that this strategy is more often followed by the supervisory and lower levels of management than the middle and top levels of management. Obviously this strategy cannot be used in order to induce compliance from the subordinates unless the superior actually does have the power and authority to implement the action.

Persuasion. About 20 per cent of the respondents identified persuasion as an influence tactic, which involves the use of facts and data to convince the subordinates for compliance. Alternatively stated, managers get their work done by convincing their subordinates that theirs are the best ways and by making them realize the importance of the job.

Threat. The third strategy, identified by about 17 per cent of the respondents, involves warning that negative consequences will follow in the event of non-compliance with the order of the superiors (e.g., fear of losing the job, etc.). However, the top managers are not at all sensitive to this strategy, while the supervisory (25%) level most often resort to it.

Personalized Relationships. Over 40 per cent of the top managers use this strategy to influence their subordinates. This strategy involves establishing personal connections with and showing loyalty to others in order to fulfill one's goals. The main idea behind it is that the more the connections one maintains, the more the power he exerts over others.

Manipulation. This strategy, often used by top managers, but not mentioned at all by the supervisors, involves many devious ways of presenting things in an indirect manner (e.g., manipulation of classified rules, divide and control, discrediting and removing others, etc.).

Maintaining Alliances. This strategy involves making contacts with powerful others. Fundamental to this strategy is the formation of alliances with people who exert power themselves or influence others who exert power.

Other Strategies. Other strategies included by the respondents (less than 6%) are *upward appeal (i.e.,* managing the subordinates by taking help from the boss, delaying in decision by forwarding the matters to the higher authorities, etc.), *providing challenging assignments (i.e.,* assigning   more important   arid   responsible   jobs),   *making   one   feel   being left   out   (i.e.,* degrading   or   decreasing   the   status   of   target   person   in

the eyes of others, etc.), *maintaining harmony (i.e.,* being friendly and creating the atmosphere of harmony with the subordinates), *showing expertise (i.e.,* using technical skills and knowledge), *ingratiation (i.e.,* using all methods of creating good impressions), and *bargaining (i.e.,* using exchange of benefits or favors).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that almost every member of the organization likes to think that he pretty much knows what power is and how to judge who has it and who does not. Indeed, people make informal judgments about others' power all the time, and do not seem to need power scales to do so. One conclusion is obvious: organizational members have definite ideas about what power is, and their ideas are not very different from those of the experts. Despite the general agreement of professional experts in industrial/organizational psychology and organizational members, power does not mean precisely the same thing to everyone; there are some differences between the views of the organizational members and those of the professional experts, and among different groups of organizational members. For example, about 59% of the respondents (see Table 1) viewed power as "authority and position." A similar observation was made in the U.S. organizations (Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick, and Mayer, 1980) that the respondents consistently talked of power as synonymous with "position and formal authority." The next most frequently mentioned definition of power, in this study, is "ability" or "potentiality" to influence others.

The question of how influence is exercised was examined through the critical incident methodology. The present study provides a comprehensive set of categories and supportive data for analyzing the downward influence process in organizations. The findings indicate that organizational members (of all levels) report similar methods of influence. Altogether 13 categories were identified (see Table 2). Out of these, six most frequently mentioned strategies were: sanctions, persuasion, threat, personalized relationships, manipulation, and maintaining alliance with others. Interestingly enough, supervisory and lower levels of management rely more often on the strong means of influence such as sanctions, persuasion, and threat, while the top managers use most often such softer means of influence as personalized relationships, manipulation, and maintaining alliance with others. Then, the critical incident technique, designed to measure the actual

job behavior and to uncover perception of causality, is based on the recollected events (Ansari and Baumgartel, 1981; Flanagan, 1954). Hence, in the present analysis, the respondents mentioned only those tactics by means of which they got their way with their subordinates. Since supervisors and low level managers deal with blue-collar workers, they are supposed to use strong means of influence. Conversely speaking, because the top managers are supposed to deal most often with their fellow managers, they have their ways by adopting softer means of influence. They may use persuasion, but it is difficult for them to use sanctions (especially negative ones) and threat.

The evidence from the United States, England, and Australia suggest that managers from these countries, on the whole, were found to be using reason (use of facts and data to support the development of logical argument) most frequently and sanctions least frequently (Kipnis et al., 1983). This different conclusion raises an important cross-cultural issue. Indian organizations are in some ways unique and their uniqueness has significant implications to organizational behavior including power-relationship (Sinha, 1982). An Indian is born with a ready-made rulebook for social relationship; his social roles are arranged in hierarchical order; that is, of superior-subordinate relationship (Kakar, 1978) or nurturant-dependency relationship (Sinha, 1980). Naturally, he does not feel comfortable working at equal levels; he no longer believes in maintaining partnership in group. This is the reason why sanctions are perceived to work best and friendliness (a powerful tactic in the U.S.A., England, and Australia) is not being encouraged in Indian organizations.

With these findings and arguments, then, is it not reasonable to claim that the task-oriented, with a blend of nurturance orientation, discipline-minded, tough leadership with personalized approach is more conducive to the Indian organizations (Sinha, 1980)?

Finally, it should be noted that several factors limit the generalizability of these findings. Our discussions are primarily based on in-depth unstructured interviewing. Hence, unless the findings are thoroughly cross-checked through technically sound and standardized instruments, any conclusion based on this study should be interpreted with greater caution. Future research should focus on the relationship between the leadership styles and behavioral strategies adopted by managers. Additional efforts should be made to investigate the individual characteristics and the characteristics of the overall organization (e g., norms, climate, structure) which are likely to have an effect on the relative effectiveness of various methods of influence.

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Add at the end, the following Tables 1 and 2:

TABLE 1: Meaning of Power (Frequency count into percentage)

Meanings	Definitions	Combined (*N*=137)	Level			
			Super-visory (*n*=18)	Low (*n*=35)	Middle (*n*=58)	Top (*n*=8)
Authority And position	Authority (both vested and delegated) to coordinate the effort of the subordinates for maximum output; also includes the power given by one's position in the organization.	59.13	72.22	60.00	50.00	100
Ability to get work done	Ability to get thing done, get work which is exercised in the direction of proper functioning of the organization.	29.93	44.44	17.14	32.76	44.44
Potentiality to influence	Capacity to influence others	19.71	27.78	34.29	31.03	50.00
Possession of resources	Possession of external things makes a person powerful (such as having wealth, status, standard of living, good pay, etc.)	18.98	27.78	31.43	31.19	0.00
Ability to control and change others' behavior	Ability of a person to control and change the behavior of others.	11.68	11.11	14.29	13.79	5.56

Ability to do things as one likes	Full capacity of an individual to move in his/her own way.	5.84	5.56	0.00	8.62	11.11
Capacity to reward and punish others	Capacity to reward and punish others	5.84	0.00	8.57	6.90	5.56
Misuses of power	Violation of rules and regulations using political maneuvering.	3.56	11.11	0.00	5.17	0.00

Note. Because there was no limit to the number of responses, combined frequencies are greater than 100 per cent; *n*s do not add up to *N* because of missing information.

TABLE 2: Behavioral Strategies (Frequency count into percentage)

| | | Level | | | |
Strategies	Combined (*N*=90)	Super-visoty (n=8)	Low (*n=25*)	Middle (*n=48*)	Top (*n=7*)
Sanctions	27.78	25.00	28.00	20.83	7.14
Persuasion	21.11	25.00	16.00	25.00	14.19
Threat	16.67	25.00	16.00	18.75	0.00
Personalized relationships	15.56	25.00	16.00	10.42	42.86
Manipulation	11.11	0.00	12.00	10.42	28.s7
Maintaining alliance	8.89	0.00	8.00	8.33	14.29
Upward appeal	5.56	0,00	4.00	6.25	14.29
Providing challe-nging assignment	5.56	0,00	4.00	8.33	0.00
Making feel left out	3.33	12.50	0.00	4.17	0.00
Maintaining harmony	3.33	0.00	12.00	0.00	0.00
Showing expertise	2.22	0.00	0.00	4.17	0.00
Ingratiation	2.22	0.00	0.00	4,17	0.00
Bargaining	2.22	0.00	0.00	2.08	14.29

Note. Because there was no limit to the number of responses, combined frequencies are greater than 100 per cent; *n*s do not add up to *N* because of missing information.