

UPWARD INFLUENCE TACTICS AS A FUNCTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE AND GOALS OF INFLUENCE ATTEMPT

MAHFOOZ A. ANSARI AND REHANA

Introduction

Social power has been of long-standing interest to social scientists, particularly to those in the fields of organizational and social psychology. Emerging literature suggests that there is an abundance of information available on downward influence process under such general framework as leadership (Ansari, Kapoor, & Rehana, 1984; Kipnis, 1976; Stitt, Schmidt, Price, & Kipnis, 1983; Stogdill, 1974). Unfortunately, researches on the ways in which people at work influence their superiors (i.e., upward influence process) are relatively few. According to Gamson (1968), the power to attain personal, group, or organizational goals should not be restricted to downward influence in organizations. It is a reciprocal process. An organization is composed of both superiors and subordinates, both of whom can influence each other's attempt; for the proper and effective functioning of the organization a kind of harmony and sound relations between the two are needed. The present paper attempts to understand how behavioural strategies in power relationships vary with respect to organizational climate and the goals of the influence attempt.

Broadly speaking, the goals of influence attempts may be of two types--personal and organizational. Personal goals may include securing benefits such as better work assignments or career advancement. Power may also be used to pursue organizational goals, for example, to encourage others to perform effectively, to promote new ideas, or to introduce

Dr. Mahfooz A. Ansari and **Ms. Rehana** are with the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur 208 016, India. The authors are thankful to Mr. H. K. Narula and Mr. N. Ansari for their assistance in data collection, and to Ms. Rashmi Shukla for her assistance in data analysis.

new work procedures (Schmidt & Kipnis, 1984). Thus managers seek to influence their superiors in order to achieve a variety of individual and organizational goals (Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1980; Mowday, 1979; Schein, 1977). The recent studies by Kipnis and his colleagues (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1983; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980) clearly point to the fact that managers vary their strategies in relation to their own objectives. For example, in order to secure personal benefits from a superior, they often use "soft" words, impression management and ingratiation. In contrast, managers often use assertiveness as a power strategy in order to pursue organizational goals.

The first objective of the present study is to understand how individuals vary their strategies with respect to their goals (personal/organizational). It was hypothesized that *individuals, irrespective of the nature of work environment, will vary their strategies to influence their superiors as a function of the goals of influence attempt*. Specifically, in the light of previous studies (Madison et al., 1980; Mowday, 1979; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1983; Kipnis et al. 1980; Schein, 1977; Schmidt & Kipnis, 1984), it was expected that individuals seeking personal goals (i.e., career advancement) will more frequently use such strategies as ingratiation and exchange, and those attaining organizational goals will more frequently use such tactics as reasons and expertise (Hypothesis 1).

The second objective is to assess the impact of the characteristics of the organizational environment (i.e., organizational climate) on the use of upward influence tactics. It has been observed that individuals act on the basis of what they perceive to be appropriate or acceptable in a given social setting (Cartwright & Zander, 1968). They receive messages and cues from different sources in the social environment which form the basis for their perception. An important source of information, according to Franklin (1975) and Likert (1967), is the manager. A new employee often learns about the behavioral norms of his or her organization by observing his or her superior behavior and interaction with subordinates (Cheng, 1983). Subsequently, he or she constructs a reality about the organization environment and adapts his behavior accordingly (Festinger, 1950; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). With this assumption, then, Cheng (1983) provided experimental data to show that the use of a particular strategy is a function of the context (climate) of the organization of which the individual is a part. In line with that study, it was hypothesized that *subordinates will vary their behavioral strategies, with respect to the nature of organizational climate, regardless of the goals of influence attempt*,

Subjects working under a rational organizational climate will make more frequent use of such rational tactics as reasons and expertise, and those working under a political organizational climate will more frequently rely on the use of such political strategies as blocking, upward appeal, exchange, and ingratiation (Hypothesis 2)

In summary, we are predicting a significant main effect of the goals of influence attempt and the organizational climate. However, considering the relative paucity of research on this topic, we are making no prediction about the interaction effect, but variables will automatically enter into the *ANOVA* design.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 37 male, undergraduates enrolled in an introductory organizational behaviour course, at the Indian Institute of Technology at Kanpur, India. They were primarily engineering majors. Data were collected from them during the spring semester of 1985. Since the experiment was conducted at the beginning of the semester, no student was acquainted, with the concept of "Influence Strategies" or "Organizational climate." The subjects ranged in age from 20 to 23 with an average of 22 years. They received credit toward their course grade.

Experimental Manipulations

The organizational climate scenarios, used in the present study, were drawn from the recent work by Cheng (1983), and were slightly modified to suit the Indian setting. The scenarios employed four highly intercorrelated dimensions based on the recent organizational climate literature (Payne & Pugh, 1976). They were: (a) managerial competence; (b) warmth and support; (c) reward orientation; and (d) rule orientation. In one form, the organization was described as positive on all four dimensions, representing a rational organizational climate. In another form, the organization was described as negative on all four dimensions, representing a non-rational (political) organizational climate.

Following the description of each climate, the second paragraph described the goal (organizational benefit/personal benefit) of the influence attempt. In order to manipulate *organizational goal*, the subjects were told: "You are working as a supervisor in this office. Due to the *Dipawali* (an important festival) rush, your groups' work load has increased greatly. It has reached the point where you find it difficult to

meet company objectives. You have decided to ask your manager to hire additional personnel for your group. Please tell us on the next page how frequently you'll take each of the following actions in response to the circumstances." The *personal goal* condition was manipulated through, the following instructions: "You are working as a supervisor in this office. You have got the information that there exists a vacancy for the post of senior supervisor in your department for which you consider yourself eligible. Besides you, some other supervisors in your department are equally competent and qualified. Because competition is intense enough, every supervisor is trying to impress the manager in order to be promoted. Please tell us on the next page how frequently you'll take each of the following actions in influencing your manager so that he/she recommends you for promotion."

Dependent Measures

Six measures of power strategies used in the present analysis were multi-item indices. Items were drawn from different sources available in current literature (Falbo, 1977; Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Kipnis et al., 1980; Singh, 1986). Only pre-tested items were included in the measures. The strategies were: Blocking (3 items: $M = 5.51$; $SD = 2.73$; Alpha = .70). Exchange of Favor (3 items: $M = 8.93$; $SD = 2.98$; Alpha = .56), Expertise: (2 items $M = 6.96$; $SD = 1.98$; Alpha = .50), Ingratiation (3 items: $M = 9.14$; $SD = 3.01$; Alpha = .67). Reasons (4 items; $M = 14.95$; $SD = 3.48$; Alpha = .76), and Upward Appeal (3 items: $M = 8.19$; $SD = 3.27$; Alpha=.78). Subjects were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale (1 = *Never*; 5 = *Very Frequently*), the frequency with which they would engage in the behaviors indicated by the scale items. The measures were as interrelated as one would expect on theoretical grounds (Average $r = .26$). Except for Expertise (which employed only 2 items), all the measures showed adequate reliabilities, and were within the range of acceptability (Nunnally, 1978).

Design and Procedure

A 2 x 2 factorial design--with two levels of the goals of influence attempt (organizational benefit/personal benefit) and two levels of organizational climate (rational/political)--was employed. Thus each subject was assigned to four treatment conditions: each condition having a climate and a goal of influence attempt. The subject was asked to read a one-page scenario which described the climate of his organization along with a goal of influence attempt. Thereafter he was asked to indicate on

the next page how frequently he would take each action in order to get his way.

This was a two-phase experiment. Each phase consisted of two conditions: a goal of influence attempt *vs.* two organizational climates. An interval of about two weeks was given in between the two phases. The presentation of scenarios (climate *vs.* goals) was done in random order to eliminate the order/sequential effects on subjects' responses.

Results

Check on experimental manipulation of organizational climate was done by using a post-experimental questionnaire which included four items: (1) organized-unorganized, (2) chaotic-orderly, (3) ambiguous-unambiguous, and (4) frustrating-enjoyable. The items were taken from the recent work by Cheng (1983). Subjects were asked to describe their overall impression of the organization using the above four items, each rated on a 7-point semantic-differential scale. Analysis indicated that, regardless of the goals of influence attempt, the main effect of climate was highly significant ($p < .001$) for each of the four dimensions. In each condition, the climate was perceived as portrayed in the scenario. This evidence indicates that the climate manipulation effect is strong and the scenarios depict the climates accurately.

The general proposition that upward influence tactics is a function of the goals of influence attempt and organizational climate was tested in a 2 x 2 completely within-subjects design (Kirk, 1968). Mean scores on power strategies are displayed in Table 1. Results disclosed that there was no significant interaction between climate and goals of influence attempt on any of the six dependent measures. However, certain main effects, as predicted, are noteworthy.

Results revealed that, significantly more individuals, irrespective of their perception about the work environment, had the tendency to employ such tactics as blocking, $F(1,108) = 5.29, p < .05, w^2 = .03$, upward appeal, $F(1,108) = 18.07, p < .01, w^2 = .11$, and reasons, $F(1,108) = 22.63, p < .01, w^2 = .16$, in organizational goal condition ($M_s = 5.85, 9.07, \text{ and } 15.96$, respectively) than in the personal goal condition ($M_s = 5.17, 7.31, \text{ and } 13.95$, respectively). On the other hand, they were likely to adopt such tactics as showing expertise, $F(1,108) = 7.98, p < .01, w^2 = .06$, and ingratiation

$F(1,108) = 6.14, p = .05; w^2 = .04$, significantly more often in personal goal condition ($M_s = 7.33$ and 9.49 , respectively) than in the organizational goal condition ($M_s = 6.80$ and 8.80 , respectively). In addition, there was a slight trend suggesting that exchange of favor was likely to be employed more often by the subjects in personal goal condition ($M = 9.24$) than in the organizational goal condition ($M = 8.62$); but the difference was not significant, $F(1,108) = 3.43, p < .05$.

The impact of organizational climate on the use of power tactics was evident in three cases (see mean scores in Table 1)—blocking, $F(1,108) = 16.12, p < .01, w^2 = .11$, upward appeal, $F(1,108) = 29.46, p < .01, w^2 = .18$, and ingratiation, $F(1,108) = 13.29, p < .001, w^2 = .10$. Subjects were likely to use these strategies significantly more often under a political climate ($M_s = 6.11, 9.31$ and 9.65 , respectively) than under a rational climate ($M_s = 4.91, 7.07$ and 8.64 , respectively), regardless of their goals of influence attempt. The hypothesis that reasons and expertise as power tactics will be employed significantly more often in the rational than in the political climate was not substantiated by the findings; however, the trends were in the expected direction.

Discussion

The findings in general supported the hypotheses. Results regarding the actors' goals of influence attempt support earlier research in that subordinates vary their power strategies with respect to the goals sought. In order to enhance personal goals (i.e., career development), the subjects were likely to choose expertise and ingratiation, whereas they were likely to employ blocking, upward appeal, and reasons as influence tactics when the goal of attempt was compatible with the organizational goal. Thus, the study confirms the expectation that strategies used by the subordinates are a function of the goals sought (Schein, 1977). Kipnis et al. (1980), in a field study, also found that, subordinates used different combination of power tactics as the reasons for influencing varied. Although the trend was in the expected direction, the hypothesis was not validated for exchange tactics in the present study.

The findings also substantiated our expectation that organizational climate makes a significant variance in the use of upward influence tactics. As anticipated, individuals responding to the political climate

scenario showed a greater tendency to employ such political tactics as blocking, upward appeal, and ingratiation. The prediction that rational tactics such as reasons and expertise will be used more frequently in rational than in political climate was not supported in the analysis; however, the trend was in the hypothesized direction. The present results can be directly substantiated by the experimental findings of Cheng (1983) who also reported similar results. In the present analysis, the exchange was the only strategy on which no main effect was significant. The same was true of the Cheng (1983) study. It might be because organizational climate alone is not sufficient to trigger the use of exchange tactics in upward influence attempt. Exchange tactics may be pursued responding to the political climate only when the person has something to offer to the immediate superior and is willing to absorb the cost involved (Cheng, 1983).

Taken as a whole, the findings of the present study provides additional support to the contextual perspective (Rousseau, 1978; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) that organizational factors make a significant contribution to the variance in influence attempt. However, the personal characteristics of the actor are relevant to individual's choice of power strategies but were not included in this study. For example, two personal traits--need for power and locus of control--seem to be relevant to individual's choice of power tactics. It is expected that a high need for power and an internal locus of control will increase the likelihood of political influence attempt (Porter, Allen, & Angle, 1981). In future, researchers may also wish to examine the interaction effects of these personal variables with organizational variables, which would lead to a more complete view of upward influence in organizations.

Finally, a word about methodology is in order. Because of our role-playing technique and the small sample size, these results should be viewed with caution. Potential limits on their generalizability are evident. Nonetheless, the present findings obtained by employing empirical role-playing technique are not inconsistent with the previous experimental and field studies. Two studies merit attention. Both Kipnis et al. (1980) and Cheng (1983) found the frequent use of reasons (or rationality) as power tactic in organizations so far as influencing the superior is concerned. The same is true for the present study. In addition, the ordering of the use of power strategies is quite similar between this study and those of Kipnis et al. (1980) and Cheng (1983). This fact may be considered as partial evidence for the external validity of the present experimental finding.

Note

1. The issue concerning the possible confounding effects because of the presence of the manipulation check items was resolved by examining the correlations between manipulation check items and the dependent measures. The analysis indicated that none of the power strategy variables was significantly correlated (even at the .05 level) with any of the manipulation check items, thereby suggesting that the observed effects of independent variables are unaffected by the manipulation check items. The second issue relates to the demand characteristics effect. Because the study employed repeated measures design, the observed effects might be attributed to the demand characteristics effect. In order to check for these effects, the first set of materials given to the subjects was analyzed. It was found that all interaction effects ($p > .05$) over all were repeated for first trial data, which may be interpreted as evidence against the demand characteristics effect.

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Table 1

Mean Scores on Power Strategies---Organizational Climate vs. Goals of Influence Conditions

| <i>Strategies</i> | <i>Goals of Influence Attempt</i> | <i>Organizational Political</i> | <i>Climate Rational</i> |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Blocking | Organizational | 6.65 | 5.05 |
| | Personal | 5.57 | 4.76 |
| Upward Appeal | Organizational | 10.08 | 8.05 |
| | Personal | 8.54 | 6.08 |
| Exchange | Organizational | 8.54 | 8.70 |
| | Personal | 9.51 | 8.97 |
| Reasons | Organizational | 15.76 | 16.16 |
| | Personal | 13.87 | 14.03 |
| Expertise | Organizational | 6.46 | 6.73 |
| | Personal | 7.00 | 7.65 |
| Ingratiation | Organizational | 9.19 | 8.41 |
| | Personal | 10.12 | 8.87 |