

## Organizational Context and Upward Influence Tactics

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The study examined, in a  $3 \times 2$  within-subjects design, the effects of two contextual variables—immediate superiors' leadership styles and the goals of influence attempts—on subordinates' use of power strategies. Sixty-nine engineering undergraduates participated in role-playing situations and were assigned to superiors with particular leadership styles as well as given influence attempt goals. Major findings were that (a) influence strategies used by subordinates varied as a function of goals sought from superiors, (b) influence strategies used by subordinates were significantly affected by the superiors' leadership styles, and (c) only one significant interaction between the leadership behavior and influence attempt goals, i.e., on blocking strategy, was noted.

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Social power as an influence on behavior is shedding some of its long-standing mystique as more people admit they like it, want it, enjoy it, and desire more of it (Booth, Vinograd-Bausell, & Harper, 1984). It is considered to be a facilitating factor when an individual strives to influence others in the achievement of organizational goals (McClelland, 1970). Emerging research indicates that power relationships in general have received attention mostly under such general frameworks as leadership and group dynamics (Ansari, Kapoor, & Rehana, 1984; Kipnis, 1976; Stitt, Schmidt, Price, & Kipnis, 1983; Stogdill, 1974). The prime concern in such investigations has been downward or lateral influence processes (Porter, Allen, & Angle, 1981). Unfortunately, there is little information available about how people at work influence their superiors (i.e., upward influence process). 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 superiors and subordinates, each of whom can influence the other; for the proper and effective functioning of the organization, a kind of harmony and sound relationship between the two is needed.

The present study is concerned with the process of upward influence. It is a study designed to understand how behavioral strategies in power

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relationships vary with respect to the characteristics of the target person and actors' goals for the influence attempt.

Why do people intend to influence their superiors? 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 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 was to understand how individuals vary their strategies with respect to their goals (personal/organizational) of influence attempt. It was hypothesized that individuals, irrespective of the leadership style of their superiors, will vary their strategies to influence their superiors as a function of the goals of influence attempts. Specifically, in the light of previous studies (Madison *et al.*, 1980; Mowday, 1979; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1983; Kipnis *et al.*, 1980; Schmidt & Kipnis, 1984), it was expected that individuals seeking personal goals (i.e., career advancement) will make more frequent use of such power strategies as ingratiation, and those pursuing organizational goals will make more frequent use of such tactics as reason and persuasion.

The second objective of the research was to investigate the link between power strategies and the leadership styles of the target person. In this study, three leadership style conditions—authoritarian (*F*), participative (*P*), and nurturant-task (*NT*)—were employed. The first two of these have frequently been studied. The third was introduced because it was believed to be salient in the culture from which our sample was drawn. Sinha (1980) recommended the salience of the *NT* style as an alternative model within the Indian culture. The following typical characteristics that the Indian subordinates bring to their organizations led to the formulation of the *NT* style: (i) Indian subordinates tend to depend excessively on their superiors, with whom they want to cultivate personalized rather than contractual work relationships; (ii) they readily accept the authority of their superior and yield to his or her demands; (iii) work is not valued in itself; and (iv) yet the subordinates are willing to work

extra hard as a part of their efforts to maintain a personalized relationship with the superior (Kakar, 1974; Pareek, 1968; Sinha, 1980). Under such conditions, according to Sinha (1980), a nurturant-task leader would be more effective. According to Sinha, the *NT* leader "cares for his subordinates, shows affection, takes personal interest in their well-being, and above all, is committed to their growth" (p. 55). He or she, however, makes his or her nurturance contingent on subordinates' task accomplishment. The effectiveness of the *NT* style has recently been demonstrated in a number of laboratory and field investigations by Sinha and others (e.g., see such reviews as those of Ansari, 1986; Sinha, 1983). In these studies, this style was perceived as distinctly different from other styles such as *F* and *P*, and it was found to have a positive impact on several indicators of effectiveness—commitment, facets of job satisfaction, and organizational productivity.

While some evidence exists as to how managers with different leadership styles influence their subordinates (e.g., Stitt *et al.*, 1983), very little is known about how subordinates influence their superiors under different leadership style conditions. However, one study attracts our attention. Cheng (1983) hypothesized that individuals working in a rational organizational climate more frequently would employ such tactics as rationality, and those working in a political climate would employ more frequently such political tactics as ingratiation or threat. He labeled rationality (or reasons) as rational tactics, and ingratiation, upward appeal, threat, blocking, and exchange as political tactics. His experimental findings showed reasonable evidence to conclude 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 anticipated that subordinates will vary their behavioral strategies with respect to the leadership styles of their superiors, regardless of the goals of the subordinates' influence attempt. Under an authoritarian (*F*) leadership style condition, the subjects will make more frequent use of such tactics as blocking, ingratiation, and upward appeal.

The nurturant-task (*NT*) and participative (*P*) styles have been found to be positively but mildly related to each other (Sinha, 1983). Although there exists a positive overlap between the two, they are conceptually distinct. The people orientation of the *P* style is of *fraternal* type, while the *NT* on this orientation is of benevolent *paternal* type (Ansari, 1986; Sinha, 1983). However, considering the fact that these two dimensions are interrelated, it was anticipated that, in the *NT* and *P* style conditions, individuals will rely more frequently on the use of such strategies as reasons and persuasion.

In summary, we predict a significant main effect of the goals of influence attempt, and we predict a significant main effect of leadership

styles. Considering the relative paucity of research on this topic, we make no prediction about interaction effects.

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

The subjects were 69 male undergraduates enrolled in an introductory organizational behavior course at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India. They were primarily engineering majors. Data were collected during the spring and fall of 1985. Since the experiment was conducted at the beginning of each semester, no student was acquainted with the concept of "influence strategies" or "managerial styles." The subjects ranged in age from 20 to 23 with an average of 21.88 years. They received credit toward their course grade for participation in the research.

### *Experimental Manipulation<sup>1</sup>*

For each of the three leadership styles under investigation, a one-paragraph story was written describing a manager using a particular style. The style scenarios were drawn from the recent works by Sinha and Sinha (1979) and Stitt *et al.* (1983), and were especially modified and worded in order to suit the upward influence framework of the present study. In addition, psychology colleagues familiar with the leadership literature independently identified and confirmed the accuracy of styles portrayed.

Following the description of each leadership, the second paragraph described the goal (organizational/personal) 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 group's workload has increased greatly. It has reached the point where you find it difficult to meet company objectives. You have decided to ask your manager (described above) 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.<sup>2</sup>

The *personal goal* condition was manipulated through the following instructions:

You are working as a supervisor in this office. You have obtained 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 (described above) in order to be promoted. Please tell us on the next page how frequently you'll take

<sup>1</sup> Copies of all experimental materials are available on request to the senior author.

<sup>2</sup> The organizational goal situation was taken from Cheng (1983, p. 343).

each of the following actions in influencing your manager so that he/she recommends you for promotion.

### *Dependent Measures*

Based upon the recent works by Falbo (1977), Falbo and Peplau (1980), and Kipnis *et al.* (1980), 22 single-statement items were employed to tap the upward influence strategies. Subjects were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *very often*) the frequency with which they would engage in the behaviors indicated by the scale items.

A partial test of the construct validity of the scales employed a varimax rotated factor analysis (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975). Table 1 reports the factor loadings obtained. It can be seen from Table 1 that four factors (consisting of a total of 17 significant items) were generated with eigenvalues greater than 1.00. It is also evident that, for the most part, the items loaded rather cleanly (i.e., loadings above .34 on the appropriate subscale, with loadings below .25 on the remaining subscales).

The internal consistency of the scales was assessed with Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$ . Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and intercorrelations among the scales are reported in Table 2. The reliabilities of the four scales were within the acceptable range. From Table 2 it can also be seen that the scales were only moderately intercorrelated (average  $r = .19$ ), indicating a reasonable level of scale independence.

### *Design and Procedure*

A  $2 \times 3$  completely within-subjects design, with two levels of the goals of influence attempt (organizational/personal) and three levels of leadership styles (authoritarian/nurturant-task/participative), was employed. Thus each subject was assigned to six treatment conditions, each condition having a leadership style and a goal of influence attempt. The subject was asked to read a one-page scenario which described the style of his manager along with a goal of influence attempt. Thereafter he was asked to indicate the frequency with which he would take each action in order to get his way. This was a two-phase experiment. Each phase consisted of three conditions: a goal of influence attempt versus three leadership styles. An interval of about 2 weeks elapsed between the two phases. The presentation of scenarios (styles versus goals) was done in random order in order to eliminate order/sequential effects on subjects' responses.

## RESULTS

### *Manipulation Checks*

Built into the stimulus scenarios were the three manipulation check items describing three styles. Subjects rated each item on a 5-point scale

TABLE 1  
ROTATED FACTORS AND ITEM LOADINGS

Item	Factor			
	Rational persuasion	Upward appeal	Ingratiation	Blocking
I'll use logic to convince him/her.	.61	-.16	-.00	-.13
I'll tell her/him that I have a lot of experience with such matters	.43	-.01	.08	.11
I'll repeatedly persuade her/him to comply with my arguments	.63	.12	.10	.24
I'll get my way by convincing him/her	.50	-.04	-.03	-.01
I'll explain the reasons for my request	.71	-.01	-.08	-.12
I'll tell him/her exactly what I want	.71	.06	.03	-.12
I'll convince her/him by stressing the importance of the issue	.79	.08	.05	-.01
I'll make her/him understand my need for her/his help	.48	.06	.16	.02
I'll ask someone higher up to back up my request	-.05	.94	.13	.16
I'll get the support of someone higher up to help me	-.03	.79	.18	.20
I'll get my way by influencing the boss of my manager	.15	.54	.07	.24
I'll try to make him/her feel important	.05	.11	.94	.13
I'll use the words which will make her/him feel good	.02	.21	.62	.15
I'll act very humbly toward him/her while making my request	.18	.18	.35	-.12
I'll not cooperate with him/her	-.11	.16	.01	.46
I'll engage myself in a work slowdown until she/he does what I want	-.06	.17	.17	.69
I'll stop work in between if my demands are not met	.07	.13	.13	.68
Percentage of variance	37.2	29.1	13.2	9.0

(1 = *quite false*; 5 = *quite true*) for whether it was true or false for their manager. This was the critical perceptual manipulation, and the study's internal validity hinges on the degree to which the subjects accurately perceived the styles of their superiors. The  $2 \times 3$  ANOVA showed a highly significant main effect of style on all the three items, and neither main effect of goals of influence attempt nor interaction was noted. Subjects saw their authoritarian manager  $F(2,340) = 207.00, p < .01$ , as more authoritarian ( $\bar{X} = 4.55$ ) than the nurturant-task ( $\bar{X} = 2.84$ ) or participative ( $\bar{X} = 1.80$ ) type. Similarly they rated their nurturant-task manager,  $F(2,340) = 84.21, p < .01$ , as more nurturant-task type ( $\bar{X} = 4.29$ ) than

TABLE 2  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, CRONBACH ALPHAS, AND PEARSON CORRELATIONS

Strategy	$\bar{X}$	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Rational persuasion	28.57	6.11	(.82)			
2. Upward appeal	7.58	3.21	.01	(.83)		
3. Ingratiation	9.33	2.93	.20	.33*	(.70)	
4. Blocking	5.26	2.38	-.04	.37*	.18	(.67)

Note. Figures in parentheses are reliability coefficients.

\*  $p < .01$ .

the authoritarian ( $\bar{X} = 2.78$ ) or participative type ( $\bar{X} = 3.33$ ). Finally, the participative manager,  $F(2,340) = 292.52$ ,  $p < .01$ , was perceived as more participative ( $\bar{X} = 4.18$ ) than the nurturant-task type ( $\bar{X} = 2.66$ ) or authoritarian type ( $\bar{X} = 1.37$ ). Thus, subjects perceived their experimental assignments as intended.

### *Effect of Contextual Factors on Upward Influence<sup>3</sup>*

The general proposition that upward influence tactics are a function of superiors' leadership styles and the goals of influence attempt was tested in a  $3 \times 2$  within-subjects design. For further clarification of results, Dunn's multiple comparison procedure was used to test the significance of intercell comparisons of interest. All comparisons were tested at the  $p < .01$  level of significance. Table 3 shows the mean scores on power strategies. Results disclosed, as expected, the main effects of target's styles and actor's goals of influence attempt on all the four strategies. Only in one case (i.e., on blocking strategy) was there a significant interaction.

It can be seen from Table 3 that the main effect of leadership styles was significant on all the influence strategies: blocking,  $F(2,340) = 26.49$ ,  $p < .01$ ; upward appeal,  $F(2,340) = 38.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ; ingratiation,  $F(2,340) = 16.82$ ,  $p < .01$ ; and rational persuasion,  $F(2,340) = 22.59$ ,  $p < .01$ . Subsequent Dunn analyses verified that, regardless of the goals of influence

<sup>3</sup> The issue concerning the possible confounding effects because of the presence of the manipulation check items was resolved by examining the correlations between the check items and the dependent measures. The analysis indicated that none of the power strategy variables was significantly correlated (even at .05 level) with any of the check items, thereby suggesting that the observed effects of independent variables are uncontaminated by the check items. Because the study employed a completely within-subjects design, the observed effects might be attributed to the demand characteristics effect. In order to check these effects, the first set of materials given to the subjects was analyzed. It was found that the effects overall were repeated for the first trial data, which may be interpreted as evidence against the demand characteristics effect.

TABLE 3  
 MEAN SCORES ON POWER STRATEGIES UNDER LEADERSHIP STYLE VS GOALS OF  
 ATTEMPT CONDITIONS

Strategy	Goal	Leadership style conditions		
		Authoritarian	Nurturant- task	Participative
Rational persuasion	Organizational	27.99	31.39	31.51
	Personal	25.26	27.35	27.93
Upward appeal	Organizational	9.80	7.62	7.29
	Personal	8.14	6.71	5.90
Ingratiation	Organizational	9.65	8.96	8.83
	Personal	10.49	9.00	9.04
Blocking	Organizational	6.91	5.09	5.04
	Personal	5.42	4.64	4.45

attempt, leader behavior made a difference in the use of upward influence tactics. The subordinates were likely to use significantly ( $p < .01$ ) more often such tactics as blocking, upward appeal, and ingratiation to influence those managers who were authoritarian rather than participative or nurturant-task oriented. On the contrary, they showed a greater ( $p < .01$ ) tendency to adopt such tactics as rational persuasion to influence those managers who were participative or nurturant-task oriented rather than autocratic. No significant differences were found between the nurturant-task and participative leader behavior conditions on any of the dependent measures.

Table 3 also reveals the impact of the goals of influence attempt on the use of power tactics. As hypothesized, this effect was significant, irrespective of superiors' leadership styles, on all the four power strategies employed in this study. Subjects had a greater tendency to employ such tactics as rational persuasion,  $F(1,340) = 70.16, p < .01$ ; upward appeal,  $F(1,340) = 32.79, p < .01$ ; and blocking,  $F(1,340) = 22.83, p < .01$ ; in order to pursue organizational goals rather than to seek personal benefits. On the other hand, they were likely to rely significantly more often on the use of ingratiation as strategy,  $F(1,340) = 4.09, p < .05$ , to influence their superiors while seeking personal benefits (i.e., career advancement) rather than while pursuing organizational goals.

One additional finding is of note. For the first time, an interaction effect (i.e., for blocking strategy) was found,  $F(2,340) = 3.40, p < .05$ , indicating that the interaction between goals of influence attempt and leadership behavior makes a significant contribution to the variance in an upward influence attempt employing blocking strategy. Dunn analyses revealed that, in the organizational goal condition, subordinates showed a greater ( $p < .01$ ) tendency to use the blocking strategy, responding with



autocratic behavior rather than with nurturant-task or participative behaviors. In the personal goal condition, they (subordinates) were likely to use this strategy significantly ( $p < .01$ ) less often to influence the nurturant-task and participative managers rather than authoritarian managers.

## DISCUSSION

The present findings in general supported the hypotheses that target's leadership styles and actors' goals of influence attempt make a significant contribution to the variance in the actors' use of power strategies in upward influence attempts. As predicted, individuals responding to the authoritarian manager showed a greater tendency to employ such nonrational tactics as blocking, upward appeal, and ingratiation. In contrast, those responding to the nurturant-task or participative manager showed a greater tendency to choose such rational strategies as rational persuasion. The data imply, in Cheng's (1983) view, 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. Individuals often learn about the behavioral norms in an organization by observing their superiors' behavior and from interaction with subordinates (Cheng, 1983). Subsequently, they construct a reality about the organizational environment and adapt their behavior accordingly (Festinger, 1950; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978).

Results regarding actor's goals of influence attempt support earlier research which showed that subordinates vary their power strategies in influencing their superiors with respect to the goals sought (see, e.g., Kipnis *et al.*, 1980; Schmidt & Kipnis, 1984). In the present study, when the goal/objective was to receive personal benefits from their superior (i.e., career advancement), the subjects most often employed ingratiation strategy while they used a combination of rational and nonrational tactics such as blocking, upward appeal, and rational persuasion in order to pursue organizational goals. This finding is in line with those obtained by Kipnis and his colleagues. They (Kipnis *et al.*, 1980; Schmidt & Kipnis, 1984) also found that subordinates used different combinations of power tactics as the reasons for influencing varied.

Although not predicted, the goals of influence attempt interacted with leader behavior only in one instance, i.e., blocking strategy. The absence of interaction on other strategies suggests that implicit notions about leadership may not vary as a function of the influence goals. Perhaps individuals possess a single implicit theory of leadership behavior that does not include other situational factors (Graves, 1985).

Taken as a whole, the findings of the present study provide additional support for the contextual perspective (Rousseau, 1978; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) that organizational factors make a significant variation in influence attempts. However, the personal characteristics of the actor may be critical to individuals' choice of power strategies but were not included in this study. For example, two such characteristics, need for power and locus of control, represent one obviously important area for additional exploration. Subordinates, according to their personal orientations, may take situational factors into account in making assessments of the relative effectiveness of different methods of influence.

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 role-playing techniques are consistent with the previous experimental and field studies. Consistent with the findings of Kipnis *et al.* (1980) and Cheng (1983), rational persuasion was rated as the strategy most frequently chosen as far as influencing the immediate superior is concerned, while blocking was the least likely chosen one (see Table 2). In addition, the ordering of the use of power strategies is quite similar between this study and those of Kipnis *et al.* and Cheng. This similarity is quite encouraging, given the many variations in research designs and samples among the three studies, and it may be considered as partial evidence for the external validity of the present experimental findings.

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