

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT AND LEADERS' USE OF INFLUENCE STRATEGIES

MAHFOOZ A. ANSARI, KANIKA TANDON, & UMA LAKHTAKIA

Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Two factorial studies, based on role-playing situations, are reported in this paper. Study 1 ($N = 88$ second-year engineering majors) examined the impact of organizational climate and subordinate performance on leaders' use of influence strategies. While climate had little or no impact, subordinate performance influenced significantly the two of the nine influence strategies--positive sanctions and withdrawal. The higher the subordinate performance perceived by the subjects the greater the likelihood of using these strategies. Study 2 ($N = 88$ first-year engineering majors) examined the role of subordinate performance and leader-member relationships on leaders' use of influence strategies. The findings regarding the performance effect were as evident in the second study as they were in the first. Additionally, the data indicated that the use of strategies is a function of the interaction between subordinate performance and leader-member relationships. Implications of these findings both for those in leaderships roles and for future research are discussed.

The term "social power" has the concept of influence inherent in it. It is defined as the "potential influence" (French & Raven, 1959) or simply as the capacity or ability to exert influence over others. Social power as an influence on behavior has received a fair amount of attention in social and organizational psychology within a theoretical framework popularly known as bases of power (French & Raven, 1959).

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Requests for reprints should be sent to Mahfooz A. Ansari, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur 208 016, India.

Despite the fact that this framework has dominated the field for about three decades, we know little as to how actual influence takes place in organizational settings. Thus, what is more important is to investigate the manner in which a leader influences his or her subordinates instead of focusing all attention on the bases of power for understanding influence (Yukl, 1981). Stated differently, coupled with research on bases of power is the need to examine the actual influence exercised by the leader. For the effective functioning of the organization it is important that the leader gets the job done amicably and efficiently. However, what influence strategies the leader uses can by no means be taken as universally fixed. Thus, the present research is an attempt to investigate the extent to which influence strategies

vary as a function of contextual factors: organizational climate, subordinate performance, and leader-subordinate relationships. It is proposed that the degree to which the leader is forced to employ certain influence tactics would be highly variable across contexts (situations).

Past research (e.g., Baumgartel, 1981; Litwin & Stringer, 1968) has shown that organizational climates set by the top leadership can and do influence the motivational orientations of managers in specific and organizationally important ways. Although members develop their own attitudes about the extent to which a given system (organization) is rational or political (Gandz & Murray, 1980), perceptions of such elements as managerial competence, fairness in reward and rule enforcement, and the like define the prevalence of behavior in organizations. "New employees often learn about the behavioral norms by observing their superiors' behavior and interaction with the subordinates" (Cheng, 1983 p. 339). According to Cheng, during this observational process, individuals construct a reality about the organizational environments and adapt their behavior accordingly (Festinger, 1950; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). There is some indication in the literature (Ansari & Kapoor, 1987; Cheng, 1983) that upward influence tactics are a function of the climate of the organization, of which the individual is a part. In these studies, it was found that the more political the climate the greater the use of political influence tactics (e.g., upward appeal), and the more rational the organizational climate the greater the use of rational tactics (e.g., rationality). Thus, it would also be of interest to examine the extent to which the climate of the organization affects the choice of downward influence tactics. *It was expected that subjects working under a rational organizational climate will show a greater likelihood of using such rational tactics as reasons and expertise, and those working*

under a political organizational climate will show a greater likelihood of using such political tactics as exchange and ingratiation.

A review of the literature (e.g., Yukl, 1981) indicates that most of the early studies on leadership were conducted by employing a correlational design with little or no concern for causality. These studies, however, assumed implicitly that leadership caused the associated differences in subordinate performance (behavior). But recent studies have discovered that the cause-effect relationship can also be the other way around (e.g., Farris & Lim, 1969; Lowin & Craig, 1968; Rosen, 1969). In essence, the subordinate performance or competence is a situational variable that appears to significantly affect leaders' influence tactics. For example, it has been found that leader behavior varies as a function of the manipulated competence of the subordinate (Lowin & Craig, 1968). In a review of dozens of studies, Sims (1980) observed a great deal of consistency among the reported results, and thus he was forced to conclude that low performance causes superiors to use coercive power. In view of such assumptions, *it was hypothesized that individuals with well performing subordinates were more likely to employ such tactics as positive sanctions, and those with poor performing subordinates were more likely to employ such tactics as negative sanctions.*

The importance of leader-member relationships has been widely emphasized in the organizational literature. Fiedler (1967), for example, in his contingency model of leadership, attaches the highest weightage to such relationships as a situational variable. It is true that the interpersonal relationships the leader establishes with his or her subordinates depend upon leader's motivational orientations. Yet, all other factors being important in their own right, leader-member relationships seems

to be the most important single element in determining the choice of leaders' influence tactics with the subordinates. *If leader-member relationship, for example, is pleasant (good), the leader would be able to obtain his or her subordinates' compliance with a minimum of effort, and he or she would show a greater likelihood of using such tactics as positive sanctions and personalized help. In contrast, if the relationship is tense, the leader would show a greater likelihood of using such tactics as negative sanctions.*

In summary, (a) a significant main effect of organizational climate is predicted, (b) a significant main effect of subordinate performance is predicted, and (c) a significant main effect of leader-member relationships is predicted. Considering the relative paucity of research on this topic, no prediction of interaction effects is ventured.

In order to test the above hypotheses, two studies were conducted. The first examined the role of organizational climate and subordinate performance on the use of influence strategies. The second study examined the role of subordinate performance and leader-member relationships on the use of influence strategies.

METHOD

Study 1

Subjects

The subjects were 88 male second-year engineering majors at the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, India. They ranged in age from 18 to 22 with a mean of 18.00 and a standard deviation of 0.83 years.

Design and Procedure

The study was a 2 x 2 factorial, with two levels of organizational climate (political/rational) and two levels of subordinate performance (extremely poor/extremely well). The 88 subjects were randomly

assigned to the four treatment levels, with 22 subjects per cell. They were presented with a one-page write-up, and thereafter asked to respond to the dependent measures and manipulation check items.

Experimental Manipulations

Subjects were presented with a two paragraph write-up, one of which dealt with climate manipulation and the other with performance manipulation.

Organizational Climate. The climate scenarios, used in the present study, were taken from the recent work by Cheng (1983). The scenarios employed four highly interrelated dimensions based on the recent climate literature (Payne & Pugh, 1976, as quoted in Cheng, 1983). They were: (a) managerial competence, (b) warmth and support, (c) reward orientation, and (d) rule orientation. The rational climate situation was created by describing the organization as positive on all the four dimensions. The non-rational (political) climate situation was created by describing the organization as negative on all the four dimensions. A more complete description of climate scenarios can be found in Cheng (1983, pp. 342-343).

Subordinate Performance. In addition to the above manipulation, each scenario varied in terms of subordinate performance: one in which the supervisor had extremely poor performing subordinates, and another in which the supervisor had extremely well performing subordinates. The scenario read as follows:

"You have worked for many units of this company in the past. Your role as supervisor has consistently been rated successful. It has been a week before you have been transferred to a unit which is known to be efficient (inefficient) one. At present there are 10 persons working under your supervision. The company record indicates that this unit has been ranked as one of the five best (worst) performing

Table 1

Factors with Sample Items

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Sample Items</i>	<i>Eigenvalue</i>	<i>% of variance</i>
Expertise and Reasons (7)	Influence them because of your competence Tell them the reasons why your plans are the best	5.2	20.9
Negative Sanctions (4)	Withhold their future advancements Give them unsatisfactory performance evaluation	3.3	13.1
Rational Persuasion (4)	Tell them the reasons for making the request to them Make them realize that you need their help	2.6	10.6
Positive Sanctions (3)	Give them satisfactory performance evaluation Recommend (or give) a salary increase	1.8	7.4
Diplomacy and Exchange (5)	Even when you know that you will not use their advise, you will consult them Offer an exchange of favor	1.6	6.4
Personalized Help (3)	Do personal favors for them Help them even in personal matters	1.4	5.6
Withdrawal (3)	Clam up (become silent) In order to maintain good relations, forget it	1.3	5.3
Ingratiation (3)	Praise them verbally for their outstanding performance Praise them with superlatives	1.1	4.5
Assertiveness (4)	Remind them repeatedly of what you want Point out the rules required that they comply	1.0	4.0

Note. Figures in parentheses are number of items.

groups. In most cases, this efficiency (inefficiency) is because of your high (low) performing subordinates; that is, they work (do not work) hard. Now you are adamant to improve the performance of your subordinates to the extent that your unit would be rated as the best (one of the best) performing group(s)."

Dependent Measures¹

In order to tap the respondents' influence strategies, 49 single-statement items were drawn from the recent work by Falbo (1977), Falbo and Peplau (1980), Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980), and Offermann and Schrier (1985). Subjects were asked to describe on a 9-point scale (*1 = Certainly would not do this; 9 = Certainly would do this*) the likelihood of their taking each of the actions in response to the circumstances.

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 names and sample items. A total of nine factors were generated, explaining about 78% of the variance. For the most part, the items loaded rather cleanly (i.e., loadings above .30 on the defining component.² In order to obtain mean factor scores, item responses were summed for each subject dividing by the number of items on the factor.

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 nine scales were within the acceptable range. From Table 2, it can also be seen that the scales were only

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Intercorrelations of Dependent Measures

Strategy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Expertise and Reasons	.70								
2. Negative Sanctions	.06	.71							
3. Rational Persuasion	.28	-.16	.71						
4. Positive Sanctions	.10	-.16	.14	.63					
5. Diplomacy and Exchange	.21	-.07	.13	.20	.70				
6. Personalized Help	.09	.01	-.02	.03	.26	.70			
7. Withdrawal	-.06	.10	.20	.02	-.02	-.01	.51		
8. Ingratiation	.23	-.03	.37	.24	.24	.03	-.10	.63	
9. Assertiveness	.38	.04	.26	.19	.36	.09	-.11	.10	.61
<i>Mean</i>	6.44	3.19	6.64	5.82	5.45	5.11	2.64	5.28	6.16
<i>SD</i>	1.15	1.50	1.61	1.61	1.32	1.64	1.30	1.67	1.32

Note. Decimal points in correlation matrix and reliability coefficients are omitted; Diagonal entries are reliability coefficients; $N = 176$; r s required to be significant at .05 and .01 levels of confidence are .15 and .20, respectively.

moderately intercorrelated, indicating a reasonable level of scale independence.

Thus subjects perceived the experimental assignments as intended.

RESULTS

*Manipulation Checks*³

Built into the stimulus scenarios were the five manipulation check items. The first described the climate of the organization. The items (organized-unorganized, chaotic-orderly, ambiguous-unambiguous, and frustrating-enjoyable) were taken from Cheng (1983). The last item referred to subordinate performance (low-high). Subjects rated each item on a 7-point semantic-differential scale. Each of the items was subjected to a 2 x 2 (climate by performance) ANOVA. The analysis indicated that, regardless of subordinate performance, the main effect of climate was significant for the first four items ($p < .001$). In each condition, the climate was perceived as portrayed in the scenario. Similarly, the main effect of subordinate performance was apparent for the last item ($p < .001$), indicating that the subordinate performance was perceived as described in the scenario.

Effects of Climate and Performance

In order to test the hypothesis regarding the effects of organizational climate and subordinate performance, a 2 x 2 ANOVA was performed on the dependent measures. Table 3 displays the mean scores on influence strategies broken down by climate (political/rational) and performance (poor/well). The analysis disclosed a main effect of climate on a single factor: ingratiation, $F(1,84) = 4.05$, $p < .05$. Compared to those in a rational climate, respondents responding to the non-rational (political) climate reported a greater likelihood of using ingratiation strategy, regardless of the subordinate performance.

The main effect of performance was significant on two influence strategies: positive sanctions, $F(1,84) = 5.92$, $p < .02$, and withdrawal, $F(1,84) = 3.39$, $p < .07$. Taken together, subjects showed a greater likelihood of using these strategies with well performing subordinates than

Table 3

Mean Scores on Influence Strategies (Study 1)

Strategy	Performance : Extremely Poor		Extremely Well		
	Climate:	Political Rational	Political	Rational	
Expertise and Reasons		6.24	6.67	6.64	6.72
Negative Sanctions		3.23	3.61	3.16	3.06
Rational Persuasion		6.61	6.23	6.18	6.28
Positive Sanctions		5.51	5.21	6.21	6.14
Diplomacy and Exchange		5.41	5.55	5.54	5.10
Personalized Help		5.38	5.17	4.95	5.53
Withdrawal		2.58	2.62	2.89	3.33
Ingratiation		5.76	4.85	5.36	4.94
Assertiveness		6.36	5.62	6.17	6.29

with poor performing subordinate, regardless of organizational climate. No significant climate x performance interaction was found on any dependent measures.

DISCUSSION

The findings provide limited support to the hypothesis that contextual factors make a significant contribution to the variance in the leaders' use of influence strategies. Regarding the climate effect, the prediction was found to be true only for ingratiation strategy. The fact that climate has no significant impact on other influence tactics is in line with the previous field research. For example, Kapoor and Ansari (1988) reported that climate had no significant role on the managers' use of influence tactics. There might be two possible explanations for the non-significant findings. One, the personal characteristics of the actor may be critical to individuals' choice of power tactics but were not included in this study. For example, two such characteristics, namely need for power and locus of control represent one obviously important area for additional exploration. Actors, according to their personal orientations, may take climate factors into account in making assessments of the relative effectiveness of different tactics of influence. Alternatively,

it might be reasoned that the climate of an organization may be a potential predictor of upward influence tactics (i.e., influencing the boss) rather than of downward influence tactics (i.e., influencing the subordinates), as has been found in previous research (e.g., Ansari & Kapoor, 1987; Cheng, 1983). However, more research in this direction is warranted.

Results of the performance effect support earlier attributional research in this area which has shown that leaders vary their influence styles with respect to subordinate performance or competence (e.g., Farris & Lim, 1968; James & White, 1983; Lowin & Craig, 1968; Rosen, 1969). In the present study, respondents showed a greater tendency to employ such tactics as positive sanctions and withdrawal for well performing subordinates than for poor performing subordinates. The greater likelihood of employing reward power for best performers in comparison to poorest performers has also been found by James and White (1933). Evidence (Lowin & Craig, 1968) also exists that high performance by the group can lead to less close supervision (i.e., a tendency of withdrawal) by the leader.

Although the findings are completely in tune both with previous research and the

present research hypotheses, the performance effects were not overly large. This might be so because performance alone cannot account for larger variance in the data. It is possible that the relationships between superior and subordinates (i.e., leader-member relationships) may also contribute significantly, either independently or interacting with subordinate performance, to the leaders' use of influence tactics. In order to investigate into this plausible explanation and its implications, it is necessary to manipulate the two independent variables--leader-member relationships and subordinate performance--in a single study. This possibility was examined in the second study reported below, that, in addition, provides an opportunity for replication.

METHOD

Study 2

Subjects

The subjects were 88 male first-year engineering majors at the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, India. They ranged in age from 17 to 20 with a mean of 18.02 and a standard deviation of 0.65 years.

Design and Procedure

We followed the same design and procedure as in Study 1 except that, in place of organizational climate, the leader-member relationships was treated as independent variable.

Experimental Manipulations

Subjects were presented with a two-paragraph write-up, one of which dealt with performance manipulation and the other with leader-member relationship manipulation.

Subordinate Performance. The same scenarios were employed as in Study 1.

Relationship. The leader-member relationships scenarios were drawn from the recent work by Offermann and Schrier

(1985). In order to manipulate relationships (unpleasant/pleasant), the subjects were told that there was a clear disagreement (agreement) between them and their subordinates on most work-related issues of importance to both of them.

Dependent Measures

The same measures were employed as in Study 1.

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks³

The internal validity of the study was ascertained by employing a three-item post-experimental questionnaire. Of three, the first two items (unpleasant-pleasant and tense-relaxed) referred to the leader-member relationships and the last one to subordinate performance (low-high). Subjects rated each item on a 7-point semantic-differential scale. Each item was subjected to a 2 x 2 (relationships by performance) ANOVA. The analysis indicated that, regardless of the subordinate performance, the main effect of relationships was significant ($p < .001$) for the first two items. In each condition, the relationship was perceived as portrayed in the scenario. Similarly, the analysis for the last item revealed that subordinate performance was perceived ($p < .001$) as described in the scenario. Thus the experimental inductions were successful.

Effects of Relationships and performance

Table 4 presents the mean scores on influence strategies broken down by leader-member relationships (unpleasant/pleasant) and subordinate performance (poor/well). Analysis of variance revealed a main effect of subordinate performance on two factors: negative sanctions, $F(1,84) = 18.06$, $p < .001$, and positive sanctions, $F(1,84) = 25.60$, $p < .001$. Results suggest that, regardless of leader-member relationships, subjects showed a greater likelihood of using positive sanctions and less likelihood

Table 4

Mean Scores on Influence Strategies (Study 2)

Strategy	Performance: Relationships	Extremelv Poor Unpleasant Pleasant	Extremelv Unpleasant Pleasant	Well Pleasant	
Expertise and Reasons		6.42	6.12	6.21	6.47
Negative Sanctions		3.73	3.72	2.54	2.51
Rational Persuasion		7.33	6.54	7.04	6.87
Positive Sanctions		5.35	5.04	6.85	6.27
Diplomacy and Exchange		5.95	5.31	5.14	5.58
Personalized Help		5.23	4.62	5.26	4.76
Withdrawal		2.36	2.17	2.03	3.15
Ingratiation		5.71	4.61	5.51	5.48
Assertiveness		6.40	6.29	6.08	6.02

of using negative sanctions with well performing subordinates than with poor performing subordinates. The main effect of relationships did not reach its significance level for any dependent measures.

Of interest were the significant interaction effects for two influence strategies--diplomacy and exchange, $F(1,84) = 3.82, p < .05$, and withdrawal, $F(1,84) = 6.67, p < .01$ --indicating that the interaction between relationships and subordinate performance makes a significant contribution to the variance in a downward influence attempt.⁴ The first interaction reveals that, having an unpleasant relationship with the subordinates, subjects reported a greater likelihood of using such strategies as diplomacy and exchange with the poor performing subordinates than with the well performing subordinates. Additionally, the more pleasant the leader-member relationships the greater the likelihood of using these influence tactics with the well performing subordinates. The second interaction suggests that the more pleasant the leader-member relationships the greater the likelihood of using the withdrawal strategy with the well performing subordinates. None of the other *post hoc* analyses was significant beyond chance.

DISCUSSION

The results are generally supportive of the hypothesis that leaders' use of influence tactics is a function of organizational context. As predicted, individuals showed a greater likelihood of using positive sanctions and less likelihood of using negative sanctions for well performing subordinates than for poor performing subordinates. Interestingly, this finding was as evident in the second study as it was in the first. This finding is completely in line with that of James and White (1983) who also reported that managers showed a tendency to employ more of reward power and less of coercive power for the best performers than for the poorest performers.

The leader-member relationships did not affect independently any influence strategies but it did interact significantly with subordinate performance in explaining the choice and use of influence tactics. Results suggest that the interaction between leader-member relationships and subordinate performance predicts positively the use of such strategies as diplomacy, exchange, and withdrawal. Exchange tactics, for example, may be used by leaders to influence the subordinates only when

they can offer something in return of the work the subordinates do for them or the favor they bestow upon them. The fact that exchange strategy is contingent on well performance and pleasant relationships is consistent with both common sense and the attributional model of leadership (e.g., Lowin & Craig, 1968). Additionally, this finding that less close supervision (i.e., withdrawal) is contingent on better relationship and well performance provide stronger support for the contextual perspective of organizational behavior (Rousseau, 1978; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

On the positive side, however, it may be concluded that the leaders' use of influence tactics is a function of organizational context. Whereas climate is found to have little impact, subordinate performance and leader-member relationships seem to be a salient, relevant predictor of the choice of influence tactics.

These data have some obvious implications for individual managers and for organizations. Before making an attempt, leaders must decide (and learn) who and how they are going to influence. They cannot employ all tactics available to them to all subordinates. There is sufficient evidence in literature to show that leaders develop different relations with different subordinates (Dansereau, Green, & Haga, 1975; James & White, 1983). The message is that managers, in order to be effective, can learn to use a variety of influence tactics but depending upon what kind of relationships they have with their subordinates and also upon the level of their subordinates' performance.

Finally, a word about methodology is in order. The present data are based on role-playing simulation and highlight what a person reports he or she would do in response to a given circumstance. In view of this, the results should be viewed with caution.

Nonetheless, some implications of the findings are obvious considering the fact that the present studies do provide experimental findings with high internal validity, which are consistent with those of the previous studies conducted in real-life work settings. Yet, future studies, especially field surveys, are needed to test the generalizability of the present findings. Future research should also focus on the personal characteristics of the leader and those of the subordinates in order to have a more complete view of downward influence tactics in organizations.

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¹In order to check the psychometric properties of the measures, data from study 1 and study 2 were pooled together (i.e., $N = 176$).

²A factor analysis was also performed on the two samples (study 1 and study 2) separately. The analysis disclosed identical factors. The construct validity was further investigated by splitting (odd-even case number) the 176 subjects into two groups. Once again, identical factors emerged in the two factor analyses.

³The presentations summarize highlights of the data; statistical information (e. g., means) not reported explicitly is available from the first author.

⁴For 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 $p < .01$ level if significance (Kirk, 1968).

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