

# Organizational Context and Ingratiation Behavior in Organizations

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**ABSTRACT** The effects of organizational climate (authoritarian, nurturant-task, or participative leadership style) and ownership (public or private) on ingratiation behavior in organizations were examined. The subjects were 294 male managers in India who represented seven manufacturing organizations, three in the public sector and four in the private sector. The results indicated that the ownership of the organization significantly moderated the relationship between organizational climate and ingratiation. In the public sector, there was more frequent use of the ingratiation tactics of using a third person, enhancement of self, and instrumental dependency, and target gratification in the nurturant-task climate. In the private sector, there was more frequent use of the tactics of disparagement of self, instrumental dependency, and target gratification in the authoritarian climate.

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**THE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER** in organizations is controlled by influence strategies. One such strategy, ingratiation, has been defined as "a class of strategic behavior illicitly designed to influence a particular other person concerning the attractiveness of one's personal qualities" (Jones, 1964, p. 11). The ingratiation goal is to modify the criteria that affect a target person's actions and decisions (especially those that have strong implications for the

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ingratiator) by introducing extraneous considerations so that ultimately the distribution of power in the relationship will be more equal (Jones).

Ingratiation has been treated as an influence strategy outside the authority of formal organizations (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1979; Ansari & Kapoor, 1987; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980) and has been found to be widely used to influence superiors, subordinates, and co workers (Ansari, 1990; Kipnis et al., 1980). With a few exceptions (e.g., Kumar & Beyerlein, 1991; Pandey & Bohra, 1984), researchers have treated ingratiation as a single strategy (Ansari, 1990; Ansari & Kapoor, 1987; Kipnis et al., 1980; Yukl & Falbe, 1940). However, Jones (1964) viewed ingratiation as attraction-seeking behavior. Because there are variations in attraction seeking behavior, it follows that there are variations in ingratiation tactics. In the present research we treated ingratiation as a multidimensional concept.

Despite its pervasive nature and its impact on an organization's effectiveness (Allen et al., 1979; Ralston, 1985), ingratiation has received minimal attention in organizational research. Ingratiation behavior does merit attention, however, because an understanding of ingratiation can contribute to an understanding of other phenomena, such as group cohesiveness, social influence and conformity, and social reinforcement. Even more important, ingratiation is pervasive in the Indian society, regardless of subcultural variations. Although ingratiation involves some risk in the Western society because the ingratiator's strategy may be sensed by the target person (Jones, 1964), it does not involve as much risk in the Indian society (Pandey, 1988), where business relationships are outwardly accommodating but latently ingratiating and manipulative (Sinha 1990). Indian subordinates' apparent dependence on their superiors, with whom they cultivate a personal relationship rather than a work relationship, and their submissive acceptance of their superiors' authority are actually ingratiatory tactics (Sinha, 1990).

There has been little research about the motivation behind Indian subordinates' ingratiatory behavior but certain conditions make this type of strategy more attractive. Our aim in this study was to identify some of the contextual determinants of ingratiation in Indian organizations. Specifically, our objective was to investigate the effect of organizational ownership on the relationship between organizational climate and the use of ingratiatory tactics.

Because ingratiation involves illicit and strategic behaviors, the social costs of unsuccessful ingratiation are likely to be high (e.g., rejection by the target, embarrassment, and feelings of inauthenticity). Consequently, potential ingratiators may assess whether their strategy will be successful before they decide to use it. Jones (1964) suggested that the decision of whether to use ingratiation is conditioned by the ingratiator's perspective, which includes environment and social conditions. Thus, organizational climate has been found to affect the use of ingratiatory behavior (Ansari & Kapoor, 1987;

Pandey & Bohra, 1984). Ansari (1990), Litwin and Stringer (1968), and Sinha (1980) postulated that the climate of an organization is determined partly by leadership style, which for our purposes in the present study, we conceptualized as authoritarian, nurturant-task, and participative.

The managers in participative climate encourage group decision making, team spirit, supportive relationships, and high goals. This type of climate will probably not be conducive to ingratiation because the managers in a participative climate are not likely to modify their standards of performance evaluation.

The managers in an authoritarian climate are status and power oriented, demanding blind obedience and personal loyalty from their subordinates. Because ingratiation feeds the target person's vanity and need for power, the possibility of successful ingratiation is perceived by the ingratiator as more probable in such a climate.

The managers in a nurturant-task climate emphasize target realization, which they reward with nurturance. This style of leadership has been recommended for subordinates who are unwilling to participate in decision-making. According to Sinha (1980), the nurturant-task leadership style is based on the Indian middle-class values of personalized relationships, dependence proneness, and *sneh-shradha* (superior's affection for the subordinate and subordinate's deference toward the superior). Ingratiation will probably be successful in such a climate because ingratiatory tactics such as instrumental dependency, target gratification, and disparagement of self are consistent with the previously mentioned Indian middle-class work values.

Because the ingratiator keeps his or her intentions hidden from the target, ingratiation evokes connotations of deceit. Dishonesty and inauthenticity are not practiced without detriment to one's self-esteem; thus, the ingratiator cognitively mollifies the illegitimacy of such tactics. Because structural variables affect this issue of legitimacy, they can encourage or discourage ingratiation (Pandey & Bohra, 1984).

Certain types of organizations provide an environment that is conducive to ingratiation. Thus, ingratiatory tactics are used more frequently in organizations in the private sector than in organizations in the public sector because the latter type of organization is structured by fixed rules and procedures that have been established by the authority of a superior body. Organizations in the public sector are subject to a greater range of rules and regulations than organizations in the private sector are (Rainey, 1983), making the decisions and actions of authorities less powerful.

Therefore, we hypothesized that the relationship between organizational climate and frequency of ingratiatory tactics would be moderated by the nature of the organization.

## Method

### *Sample and Procedure*

Seven medium-sized diverse manufacturing organizations in northern India were approached for data collection. Three of the organizations were in the public sector and were involved in the manufacture of chemicals, television sets, and scooters, and four of the organizations were in the private sector. After the organizations agreed to participate, the personnel departments were asked to supply a list of managers. Data were collected from a total of 350 randomly selected male managers, 56 of whom were eliminated because of missing data. Of these 294 subjects, 179 worked in the public sector and 115 worked in the private sector. The subjects' mean age was 41.83 years, and their average tenure in the organization was 13.56 years. The majority of the subjects had at least a bachelor's degree. Most of the respondents (69.73%) had technical jobs.

### *Measures*

***Ingratiation.*** We developed a 35-item multidimensional scale to assess the respondents' ingratiation behavior. The scale consisted of seven subscales, with five items each. The subscales were Other Enhancement, Self Enhancement, Opinion Conformity, Self-Degradation, Instrumental Dependency, Third-Party Directed, and Name Dropping. The subjects were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale that ranged from *never* (1) to *always* (7) how often they had used each of the actions described in the scale items to influence their immediate superior at work during the past 6 months.

We performed a partial test of the construct validity of the scale, using factor analysis with varimax rotation. We limited the eigenvalues to those greater than 1.00 and factor loadings to those that were .40 or greater on the defining component and had no cross-loadings greater than .25. Five factors met these criteria, accounting for 53.80% of the variance. We named Factor 1, Using a Third Person (ingratiation accomplished by accepting the help of a third person who was not directly involved in the interaction between the target and the ingratiation, 10 items, coefficient  $a = .93$ ); Factor 2, Enhancement of Self (ingratiation through the explicit presentation or description of one's positive attributes, 6 items, coefficient  $a = .82$ ); Factor 3, Disparagement of Self (ingratiation through the manifestation of one's negative attributes to downplay the target person's superiority, 4 items, coefficient  $a = .74$ ); Factor 4, Instrumental Dependency (ingratiation by inducing social responsibility in the target person by demonstrating dependence on him or her, 3 items, coefficient  $a = .85$ ); and Factor 5, Target Gratification (ingratiation through gratification of the target, 4 items, coefficient  $a = .72$ ). An examina-

tion of the intercorrelations among the factors indicated that only two correlations were above the .50 level, one between Instrumental Dependency and Disparagement of Self ( $r = .52$ ); and another between Instrumental Dependency and Using a Third Person ( $r = .52$ ).

This overlap could be attributed to the fact that all three ingratiation tactics are based on the Indian middle-class values of personalized relationships and dependence proneness. Overall, however, the tactics were only moderately intercorrelated (average  $r = .40$ ), indicating a reasonable level of independence. The alpha coefficients of the five subscales were fairly high (the range was between .72 and .93), indicating high internal consistency in the responses. The subscales were also found to be free from the social desirability effect.<sup>1</sup>

**Climate.** We used a modified version of Sinha's (1987) 24-item scale to measure the three types of organizational climate. The respondents were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale that ranged from *never* (1) to *always* (7) how often the statements were true for the managers in their organization. The reliabilities, means, and standard deviations for the three subscales were .57, 30.85, and 8.89 for the Participative subscale; .89, 35.78, and 9.57 for the Nurturant-Task subscale; and .54, 37.34, and 6.16 for the Authoritarian subscale, respectively.

## Results

We examined the effect of ownership on the relationship between organizational climate and ingratiation, using a stepwise multiple regression analysis.

The analysis indicated that, in the public sector, the nurturant-task climate predicted the use of such ingratiation tactics as using a third person ( $R^2 = .07$ ,  $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .01$ ), enhancement of self ( $R^2 = .03$ ,  $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .05$ ), instrumental dependency ( $R^2 = .08$ ,  $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and target gratification ( $R^2 = .15$ ,  $\beta = .39$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The authoritarian climate contributed negatively ( $R^2 = .02$ ,  $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ) to the frequency of the ingratiation tactic of using a third person. The participative climate did not affect the use of any ingratiation tactics in the public sector.

In the private sector, the nurturant-task climate contributed positively to the use of the disparagement of self tactic, ( $R^2 = .07$ ,  $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and negatively to the tactic of using a third person, ( $R^2 = .08$ ,  $\beta = -.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The authoritarian climate positively predicted the use of the tactics of disparagement of self ( $R^2 = .04$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .01$ ); instrumental dependency

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<sup>1</sup> The questionnaire and information about statistical procedures are available from the authors.

( $R^2 = .11$ ,  $\beta = .33$ ,  $p < .01$ ); and target gratification ( $R^2 = .10$ ,  $\beta = .31$ ,  $p < .01$ ). A participative climate was not associated with any ingratiation tactics.

### Discussion

Taken as a whole, the findings suggest that the nature of the organization moderated the relationship between organizational climate and ingratiation. Ingratiation seems to have been used frequently in the nurturant-task climate in the public sector. In the Indian culture, business relationships in the public sector tend to be personalized. An ingratiation probably perceives that there is a greater probability of success in the nurturant-task climate because such a climate is based on the Indian middle-class values of personalized relationships, dependence proneness, and *sneh-shardha* (Sinha, 1980). Ingratiation attempts that involve instrumental dependency and target gratification can be attributed to these values rather than to any strategic intention. One reason why an authoritarian climate is negatively related to the ingratiation tactic of using a third person may be that, in a public-sector organization, rigid rules and regulations make it more difficult for the superiors to suppress their subordinates' creative abilities.

In the private sector, ingratiation occurred more frequently in the authoritarian climate, possibly because ingratiation is an informal way of obtaining power and, thus can be used only in situations in which rules are not extremely rigid and the decision-making process is influenced by the superior's leadership style. Tactics such as disparagement of self, instrumental dependency, and target gratification are generally used for defensive purposes (Jones & Berglass, 1978). Thus, ingratiation tactics were used to prevent or blunt potential attack rather than in the interest of acquisitive considerations in which case the use of a positive self-presentational tactic would be more likely (Von Baeyer, Snek, & Zanna, 1982). In an authoritarian climate, instrumental dependency would be a more successful tactic, perhaps because superiors in this type of climate expect their subordinates to be dependent. Alternatively, tactics such as disparagement of self and target gratification might be more successful in an authoritarian climate because superiors in this type of climate are concerned with status and personalized power management. An authoritarian climate was a better predictor of ingratiation probably because superiors in the private sector can easily suppress their subordinates' creative abilities. The nurturant-task organizational climate was not a strong predictor of ingratiation because in privately managed organizations task realization is emphasized more than relationship orientation is.

The present data suggest that climate is an important determinant of ingratiation. Because the climate of Indian organizations is generally either authoritarian (Meade & Whittaker, 1967) or nurturant-task oriented (Ansari, 1986), ingratiation is likely to be successful. Moreover, tactics such as dispar-

agement of self, instrumental dependency, and target gratification can be used more effectively in organizations in which there are fewer rules.

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