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The Role of Upward Influence in Organizational Politics: A Discussion on the Effectiveness of Single and Combined Influence Tactics in an Upward Direction

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THE ROLE OF UPWARD INFLUENCE IN ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS: A DISCUSSION ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SINGLE AND COMBINED INFLUENCE TACTICS IN AN UPWARD DIRECTION

by
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Abstract

As part of organizational politics, influence allows employees to impact the attitudes and behaviors of peers, supervisors, and subordinates. Even though there are a variety of influence tactics, this thesis examines the few tactics used individually and in combination in an upward direction. This thesis adds to upward influence literature by discussing not only effective upward tactics, but also strategies found in unsuccessful attempts, providing insights for employees. The individual influence tactics discussed to be most successful are rational persuasion, consultation, and ingratiation, while exchange tactics are likely to lead to a failed influence attempt. The combined influence tactics found to lead to a greater chance of success are soft and rational tactics, while combinations of hard as well as hard and soft tactics were shown to be less successful in upward influence attempts. Additionally, limitations and future research on upward influence are identified in the thesis.

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Introduction

Organizational politics are informal exercises of power, authority, and influence to achieve an objective within any organization, such as a club or a large corporation (Brandon & Seldman, 2004; Hochwarter, Witt, & Kacmar, 2000). Today, jobs at organizations frequently require the use of organizational politics to affect decision-making. Organizational politics is commonly referred to somewhat pejoratively as “office politics” (Kennedy & Yukl, 2003). Examples range from office gossip, to asking for a promotion or vacation time, to distributing work to or sharing responsibilities with other employees. Because most people need to hold jobs during their lives to make a living, it is inevitable that most people will need to engage in some form of organizational politics, and inherent in the ability to succeed in organizational politics is the role that influence plays, particularly upward influence.

Learning how to exert influence effectively is part of mastering the ability to ensure the compliance and approval of others in the attainment of personal and organizational goals (Barry & Shapiro, 1992). Because organizations contain individuals with varying interests that need to be aligned, it is necessary to communicate thoughts, acquire consent to plans, and to galvanize others to support and implement ideas (Yukl, 1989). Influence allows employees of an organization to affect the attitudes and behaviors of others and to encourage intended action (Keys & Case, 1990). Employees use influence to convince their subordinates, peers, and supervisors of an idea or plan. When influencing subordinates and peers, employees often are requesting information, seeking assistance, or assigning a task (Yukl & Falbe, 1990). In contrast, the objective of employees influencing supervisors is to seek advice, or to either request approval or support for a proposal (Yukl & Falbe, 1990). While knowing how to ask another employee for help on a task is important, effectively convincing a supervisor of a proposal can lead not only to approval of daily work projects, but also to larger and favorable consequences, such as career development and advancement, increased earnings and bonuses, improved confidence and empowerment (Case, Dosier, Murkison, & Keys, 1988; Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003; Schilit & Locke, 1982). Because upward influence usually has greater implications for individuals than influencing in any of the other directions, it is of key importance for so many people. It is therefore worthy of study and, because it plays such an important role in organizational politics, deserves an entire thesis.

Deluga and Perry (1991) described upward influence as “an attempt made by the subordinate to secure a desired response from the superior.” Porter, Allen, and Angle (1983) enhanced this definition by defining a superior as “someone higher in the formal hierarchy of authority in an organization.” The body of upward influence research has focused on identifying tactics, determinants, effectiveness, and short-term outcomes, as well as developing taxonomies. This thesis reviews available literature on the effectiveness of upward influence tactics, and compares data between various American studies. This thesis begins with a literature review that includes sections on introducing organizational politics, influence, early studies of influence, and upward influence. Following that, the discussion section examines articles on single and combined influence tactics in the upward direction, as well as considering limitations of this thesis and future research for upward influence. Lastly, the conclusion section suggests practical advice for employees based on an implications from the thesis.

Most literature on upward influence research relates to either individuals using a single tactic or two tactics simultaneously in seeking to influence (Higgins, Judge, and Ferris, 2003; Schilit & Locke, 1982). Unlike most other upward influence research, this thesis addresses in one analysis the effectiveness of both single and combined tactics for effecting influence. While researchers have identified numerous influence tactics, this thesis highlights that there are only a few tactics, whether employed individually or in combination, which can ultimately lead to success in influencing those in higher positions. Furthermore, most of the literature does not explicitly discuss the different types of influence tactics that are ineffective in upward scenarios. This thesis attempts to fill in that gap in upward influence literature. It is necessary to know which tactics to avoid, since some of them can lead to unintended or negative repercussions, and, therefore, identifying the unsuccessful tactics can be as important as focusing on those that have proven to be successful. Lastly, this thesis indicates that both successful and unsuccessful (single as well as combined) tactics of upward influence should be of vital interest to all employees and organizations.

Literature Review

Organizational Politics

In order to be successful at organizational politics, which occurs in every company, employees must understand the foundations of influence, a key dimension of organizational politics (The Power to Influence, 2012). Power (the ability to assert one's will over others and command obedience) and authority (the legitimate and socially approved use of control to gain compliance) also comprise dimensions of organizational politics (Kellerman, 2010). During the past fifty years, the theories and research relating to organizational politics have evolved from contributors such as Erving Goffman, Edward Jones, James Tedeschi, Robert Allen, Barry Schlenker, Mark Leary, Henry Mintzberg, as well as others in social psychology, organizational behavior, and political science. In general, organizational politics is a broad term for behaviors that are seen as self-serving endeavors designed to preserve or advance the ambitions of individuals or groups in the workplace (Allen & Porter, 1983; DuBrin, 2009; McShane & Von Glinow, 2005). No matter the type of office environment, learning how to navigate organizational politics is an important skill. It is widely acknowledged that being skilled at both taking advantage of tactics and resources as well as accurately identifying social contexts results in expedited career advancement (DuBrin, 2009; Ferris & Treadway, 2012). While office politics are sometimes thought of as nefarious and odious, researchers, like Jeffrey Pfeffer (1994), believe that politics are neither inherently good nor bad. They are most commonly apparent in office gossip, such as when employees discuss their bosses and how to deal with them amongst each other. Gandz and Murray (1980) found that 60 percent of casual conversation at work is considered office politics. Any behavior that is considered normal or sanctioned for a role is not necessarily political. For instance, an action performed to accomplish a work task for a formal role does not fall under organizational politics. As a point of clarification, according to researchers Allen and Porter (1983), a behavior that is not meant to have a direct impact on an individual's actions is looked upon as non-political. Most scholars agree that influence tactics are regarded as organizational politics, on account of these strategies being used to enhance the self-interest of an individual, even perhaps at the cost of others and possibly an organization or team (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1979; Allen & Porter, 1983; DuBrin, 2009; McShane & Von Glinow, 2005; Mowday, 1978). Furthermore, researchers such as Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwater, Kacmar, and Douglas (2005) characterized influence as a primary dimension of organizational politics.

Influence

In the context of this thesis, influence is defined as any behavior that tries to change the attitudes, behaviors, or values of an individual or entity to encourage action in accordance with the objectives of the agent of influence (Deluga & Perry, 1991). Others have deemed influence as "getting one's way" (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980). Furthermore, influence attempts to play an important function in the fulfillment of goals. For example, if an employee is seeking a promotion, that individual might need to gain favor with a supervisor (DuBrin, 2009). This might involve acting in a friendly fashion with a supervisor and praising the supervisor to boost the supervisor's ego (DuBrin, 2009). Influencing subordinates, peers, and superiors is a crucial determinant of employee effectiveness (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Yukl & Falbe, 1990). Tactics are considered successful if they produce an intended result by an influencer. However, the use of influence tactics does not by itself equate to success, and some strategies that work in some situations will be unsuccessful in others (Keys, & Case, 1990). Influence tactics usually rely on words and relationships for impact, and while holding a position of power assists in influencing a target, formal authority is unnecessary to manipulate the decisions of others (Keys & Case, 1990). Other terms for influence such as "compliance-gaining behaviors" and "request strategies" have also been employed in communication theory research (Wheeless, Barraclough, & Stewart, 1983).

To be successful in the workplace, an individual must be able to gain the cooperation of others to follow their advice or plans without formal power or authority (DuBrin, 2009; Yukl, 1989). For instance, if an employee is working with a team of people, that individual will have to rely on influence as a way to gain cooperation. Cohen and Bradford (2005) found that employees are more likely to attempt influencing others when: 1) there is a large power disparity between an influencer and a target [an individual or group], 2) an influencer is unable to identify mutual understanding with a target, 3) the coworkers deem the influencer as a competitor, or 4) the co-workers are not meeting the influencer's performance expectations or have conflicting reward ideas. In the workplace, employees can increase their effectiveness and capacity to influence when faced with the above listed situations by identifying who their target is and when, how, and which influence tactics should be exercised. The overuse of formal authority to influence can have unintended consequences. For example, forceful directives were found to be related to employees' negative emotions, such as anger and fear, which can induce a toxic work environment (Farh, Cheng, Chou, Chu, 2006).

In general, it is accepted that there are three directions in which an agent can direct influence: upward (a subordinate influencing a superior), downward (a superior influencing a subordinate), and laterally (an employee influencing a peer). A less acknowledged fourth direction is outward, which was proposed by Keys and Bell (1982) in their Four Faces Model. When managers use influence to direct customers, suppliers, the general public, or anyone external to an organization, they are using outward influence. The premise of the Four Faces Model is that effective managers are able to exert appropriate influence in four directions (upward, downward, laterally, and outward). Informed managers can learn from published organizational research how to influence in all directions, becoming well-rounded leaders.

Table 1 (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Yukl, 2006; Yukl & Falbe, 1990) presents definitions and examples of the most commonly accepted influence strategies to date. While all of these influence tactics are effective in various situations, subordinates attempting to manage-up must strategically choose which tactics they use because of their lack of authority (Allen & Porter, 1983; Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003).

Table 1: Definitions and Examples of Primary Influence Strategies

Influence Tactics	**Definition**
Rational Persuasion	The influencer uses logical and reasonable arguments with factual evidence to convince the target that a proposal is viable and likely to result in the attainment of task objectives. For example, an employee will present a slideshow with condensed, analyzed data to persuade a supervisor that a requested initiative is feasible.
Assertiveness/Pressure	The influencer uses demands, threats, forceful reminders, or coercion to coax a target into complying with what that person is requesting. For example, an employee will yell insults about another employee's ideas to intimidate him or her to follow a particular direction.
Exchange	The influencer gives an explicit or implicit promise of a mutually beneficial exchange if a target helps accomplish a task. For example, a manager will allow an employee to take Friday afternoon off if that employee stays one night that week and helps the manager finish a project.
Coalition	The influencer seeks the assistance or support of others to apply pressure on the target to obtain support for an idea. For example, an employee will say he or she works in conjunction with his or her peers to pressure the Human Resources department to increase wages.
Ingratiation	The influencer aims to get the target in a positive mood or think favorably of the influencer prior to making a request or proposal. For example, an employee will compliment a boss' children, before asking to be added to a project.

Inspiration Appeal	The influencer makes a request or proposal that arouses enthusiasm by appealing to a target's values, ideals, aspirations, or ego. For example, an employee will tell another employee, "You are the best person to assist with this merger because you care about business operations and retaining talent."
Consultation	The influencer seeks the target's participation in planning how to implement a strategy, policy, activity, or change to gain the target's support and assistance on a project. For example, an employee will ask for a suggestion from another employee on the direction of a project, while guiding him or her to an acceptable solution in order to provide him or her with a sense of ownership and support for a project.
Upward Appeal	The influencer attempts to gain support of a target from upper management to gain approval of an idea. For example, an employee will stay at work late at night to show that he or she is truly committed in hopes of being taken more seriously.
Legitimating	The influencer seeks to establish the legitimacy of a request by claiming the authority to make it, or by verifying that it is consistent with organizational policies, rules, practices, or traditions. For example, an employee will claim his or her idea to ensure the safety and health of others is in accordance with company policy, convincing another employee to authorize enhanced safety training for natural disasters.
Personal Appeals	The influencer appeals to a target's feelings of loyalty and friendship toward him or her before making a request. For example, an employee will say, "You and I have worked together at this company for a long time. Do you think you could help me get this policy approved?"

(Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Yukl, 2006; Yukl & Falbe, 1990)

Early Studies of Influence

Even though research on organizational politics began in the 1950s, it was not until the 1980s that a few notable, empirical studies triggered an explosion of interest in the area of influence tactics. Researchers were previously only concerned with the way managers could influence subordinates (downward influence) and had not explored influence in other directions. In 1980, Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson were the first to notably investigate taxonomies of influence behavior used by individuals in the workplace. In the first part of the study, 165 managers were told to individually write a paragraph describing “How I get my way” with their bosses, coworkers, and subordinates. 370 tactics were described by the participants and then grouped into 14 categories. In the second part of the study, a 58 item questionnaire was generated based on the original 370 tactics. The researchers asked a new group of 754 participants to describe how frequently they used each of the 58 items to influence a subordinate, peer, or superior. According to an analysis of the questionnaire results, eight types of influence tactics were defined: assertiveness, ingratiation, rationality, sanctions, exchange, upward appeals, blocking, and coalitions. With this new taxonomy, in 1982, Kipnis and Schmidt were the first to commercialize a measurement tool called The Profiles of Organizational Influence Strategies or POIS to study influence behavior. Subsequent research by Schriesheim and Hinkin (1990) found evidence validating the POIS test, proving its reliability. The research and tool is still the foundation for all other influence studies today.

Later, Kipnis and Schmidt (1985) grouped the eight strategies into three categories: hard, soft, and rational. Hard tactics include assertive behaviors, upward appeals, and coalitions (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985). They are utilized when an influencer has leverage, is expecting opposition, or a target's actions disregard norms (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985). Some examples include: negotiating with rewards and punishments, threatening to quit or taking the matter over the target's head, or blackmailing the target (Farmer, Masyln, Fedor, & Goodman, 1997). Soft tactics involve the use of ingratiation, and are normally exercised when an influencer is facing a drawback, anticipating resistance, or wants to derive personal benefit while permitting the target the freedom to determine whether or not to comply (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985; Leong, Bond, & Fu, 2006). Soft tactics are also less aggressive than hard tactics, and require a great amount of psychological manipulation (Farmer, Masyln, Fedor, & Goodman, 1997). For that reason, soft tactics depend upon an individual's ability to identify the motivations and needs of others to establish influence (Farmer, Masyln, Fedor, & Goodman, 1997). Rational tactics are comprised of rational persuasion and exchange (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985). These tactics are used when an influencer expects compliance and neither the agent nor target has a real power advantage (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985). Rational tactics have fewer negative consequences than hard tactics, so they are more appealing to agents of influence and will be reviewed later in the discussion section (Farmer, Masyln, Fedor, & Goodman, 1997).

Kipnis’ and Schmidt's classifications remain widely used in influence research. However, there is some disagreement as to whether soft tactics should include ingratiation as well as exchange, consultation, and personal appeal, and if rational tactics should only involve rational persuasion/logic/reason (Castro, Douglas, Hochwarter, Ferris, & Frink, 2003; Farmer, Masyln, Fedor, & Goodman, 1997; Yukl, 1989)**.** The soft, hard, and rational influence categories were explored in later research, guiding how managers apply a combination of influence tactics successfully. However, differences in opinion over which tactics fit within each category has made comparing studies more difficult.

Subsequently, Yukl and Falbe (1990) refined and extended Kipnis’, Schmidt’s, and Wilkinson’s 1980 influence research by asking both agents of influence (197 participants) as well as targets (237 participants) to respond to a questionnaire. The study likewise found six of the original tactics (upward appeal, exchange, coalition, ingratiation, rational persuasion, pressure [also known as assertiveness]), and added two new ones (inspirational appeals and consultation). The tactics of blocking and sanctions were also identified, but were described as erroneous and since have largely been excluded in this research area**.** Yukl and Falbe (1990) also developed an instrument that measures influence and objectives, which is used as an alternative to the Kipnis and Schmidt POIS. This alternative is called the Influence Behavior Questionnaire (IBQ). It uses a scale to measure how frequently a particular individual uses each type of influence behavior, and has become a widespread tool in research.

As the study of influence has grown, researchers have proposed a few supplementary tactics (Table 1, p. 13) in addition to the eight classified by Yukl and Falbe. More recently, influence research has focused on defining new tactics such as gifting as well as uncovering determinants such as gender and personality (Cable & Judge, 2003; Leong, Bond, & Fu, 2006; Smith, Watkins, Burke, Christian, Smith, Hall, & Simms, 2013; Yukl, 2006).

Table 2: Influence Tactics Noted In Other Studies

Influence Tactic	**Study**
• *Friendliness*	Tepper, Brown, & Hunt, 1993
• *Personal Appeal* • *Legitimating*	Yukl, & Tracey, 1992; Yukl, & Tracey, 1992; Yukl, Guinan, & Sottolano, 1995
• *Apprising* • *Collaboration* • *Gifting* • *Informal Approach* • *Written Explanation* • *Socializing*	Leong, Bond, & Fu, 2006; Yukl, 2006
• *Manipulation* • *Persistence* • *Rewarding*	Mowday, 1978; Porter, Allen, & Angle, 1981; Steensma & Milligen, 2003
• *Politicking*	Steensma & Milligen, 2003

Upward Influence

In the context of this paper, upward influence is defined as an attempt by an individual in a lower ranking role to obtain conformity from those in higher positions and for the target to yield to desired outcomes (Allen & Porter, 1983; Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; McShane & Von Glinow, 2005). As compared to others in the workforce, employees with less power and authority will typically utilize upward influence tactics the most in order to gain compliance from their bosses (Kellerman, 2008; Schilit & Locke, 1982). Depending on the situation, different influence tactics can be effective; however, specifically for subordinates attempting to influence their supervisors, there are only a few tactics that have been shown to work (Allen & Porter, 1983; Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003). Thus, employees should strategically choose which tactics to use before attempting to influence others.

Another term to describe the phenomenon of upward influence is “managing up.” Even though this phrase carries some negative connotation, knowing how to implement upward influence tactics is a vital skill that anyone with a boss should learn in order to effectively engage and communicate ideas and knowledge (Cohen & Bradford, 1984; Keys & Case, 1990). In addition, spending time with a boss while exercising upward influence will increase employee job satisfaction as well as employee-supervisor relationships. According to a study done by Leadership IQ in 2014 surveying 32,410 American and Canadian executives, managers, and employees:

“People who spend 6 hours per week interacting with their leader are 30% more engaged and 29% more inspired than people who only spend 1 hour per week interacting with their leader” (Murphy, 2014). Presumably, upward influence would also teach an employee how to take into account other perspectives and work preferences to attain individual needs, which is another beneficial skill in the workplace mastered through upward influence attempts.

Teaching employees how to influence those above them is also favorable for companies. It is impossible for a chief executive officer to make all decisions on his or her own (Myers, 2011). Moreover, it is beyond the bounds of possibility for a chief executive officer to personally work on every project. These constraints mean that a chief executive officer must rely on the efforts of others and be able to determine which directions employees should follow while it is necessary for employees throughout the company to implement decisions made by management and know how to effectively influence that decision-making process. When upper management listens to the ideas and concepts of their employees, this can result in significant progress which might otherwise not occur. For example, Jony Ive as Senior Vice President of Industrial Design at Apple was able to design and bring to market some of Apple’s most successful products, such as the 1998 Mac, the 2001 iPod, 2007 iPhone, and 2015 Apple Watch (Fingas, 2015). Jony Ive might never have had that opportunity, and Apple might never have enjoyed its phenomenal success, had the CEO of Apple at the time (Steve Jobs and then Tim Cook) not listened to and been influenced by the ideas and concepts of Jony Ive.

Utilizing upward influence tactics is especially relevant in, and suited to, the 21st century work environment. The rise of technology in the last decade has resulted in the increased need for collaboration within the workplace. According to a 2014 Peer Research Center study, email and the internet are seen as the most important forms of communication and information tools used among employees (Purcell & Rainie, 2014). These tools encourage upward influence because they make it easier to approach and contact those in higher positions and to promote consent to a desired outcome.

In addition, in a flattened organizational structure, in which layers of management of a business are eliminated, lower level employees are given more opportunities to make more decisions (Wulf, 2012). For that reason, employees need to be able to influence their supervisors to encourage proposals and influence work (Wulf, 2012). There is a growing trend in American companies to increasingly flatten organizational structures (Markgraf, B., n.d.). Companies like Medium, Buffer, and Zappos have all claimed that this type of structure empowers employees and provides an opportunity to cut costs (Frink, 2003). Flat structures allow individuals to feel confident enough to apply upward influence strategies with C-suite employees.

Upward influence is particularly relevant in an environment of constant downsizing (Castro, Douglas, Hochwarter, Ferris, & Frink, 2003). Because individuals feel protective of their roles, they attempt upward influence tactics to advocate for their proposals in order to demonstrate their personal and unique value to their superiors. Thus, knowing which tactics are most advantageous to boost the likelihood of success for influencing a supervisor is essential in this modern period. For this reason, the following discussion examines research on the success and failure of using both single and combined influence tactics in an upward direction.

Discussion Part One: Individual Upward Influence Tactics

Achieving Upward Influence with Single Tactics

Over the years, researchers have studied numerous influence tactics, but only a few individual strategies were reported as suitable for galvanizing supervisors to carry out desired outcomes by a subordinate. This is because subordinates normally have less power and, therefore, no formal authority over those who they are trying to upwardly influence (Porter, Allen, & Angle, 1981). Consequently, an agent of upward influence has less leverage over the target (Yukl & Tracey, 1992). For that reason, influence tactics that are usually successful in downward or lateral attempts are weaker in upward attempts (Yukl & Tracey, 1992). Thus, Schilit and Locke (1982), Keys and Case (1990), as well as Yukl and Tracey (1992) agree that there are only a few tactics in an upward direction that have been shown to have some degree of success in affecting the thoughts, behavior, and feelings of a target: rational persuasion, consultation, and ingratiation. Inversely, influence tactics such as exchange should not be carried out in upward influence situations because of their weak correlation to successful upward attempts.

Successful Tactic: Rational Persuasion

Based on quantitative and qualitative research, rational persuasion is the most relied upon strategy and is consistently found to be the most successful upward influence tactic. Schilit and Locke (1982) found that the most frequent approach to influence those in higher positions was to logically present one’s ideas. Out of 83 subordinate perspectives in the research study, 75 participants said they used rational persuasion in upward influence attempts (Schilit & Locke, 1982). To attain this information, 83 full-time employed participants, who were older than 20 years of age and settled at a company for at least six months prior to the study, were given the unbiased prompt, “please describe a time when you, either acting alone or with others, successfully/unsuccessfully influenced a supervisor and attained personal, group, or organizational goals” (Schilit & Locke, 1982). Because the questions are open-ended and unbiased, the interviewees were not prompted to respond in a constrained or scripted manner. Consequently, Schilit and Locke’s (1982) data on rational persuasion as well as other tactics produced reliable information on the effectiveness of upward influence. Furthermore, the study seems to provide valuable and preliminary data, revealing that the presentation of logical arguments to a supervisor is the most frequently used and effective strategy in the workplace. Keys and Case (1990) strengthened the findings of the previous research by following Schilit and Locke’s research method, although the sample differed in that all participants were not only employed for at least six months, but were also managers. Therefore, Keys and Case verified the external validity of Schilit and Locke’s research by similarly concluding that rational persuasion was the most common way in which employees influenced their bosses.

Another study verifying the high frequency of rational persuasion when convincing those in higher positions of an argument is Yukl’s and Tracey’s

1992 research. In the first part of the study, a consulting company administered a questionnaire to 526 subordinates, 543 peers, and 128 supervisors pertaining to 128 managers,an average of eight respondents per manager (Yukl & Tracey, 1992). The sample size was quite large, legitimizing the accuracy and confirming again that managers most often use reason and logic to successfully persuade higher ranking colleagues of their objective. Additionally, in Schilit and Locke’s (1982) research, the average age was 27 years old, and in Yukl’s and Tracey’s (1992) study the mean age was 40 years old. The diversity of age reveals that these findings can be generalized across age groups. Nevertheless, more and updated research on the impact of age on upward influence tactics is needed before making any definitive statements. As a whole, the body of work, in which rational persuasion is consistently indicated as the primary strategy to successfully influence those in higher positions, is overwhelmingly convincing.

Even though rational persuasion is the most effective single upward influence tactic, knowing how and when to implement it takes not only training, but also competence (Cohen & Bradford, 2005). Therefore, there is no guarantee of success when an agent uses logic or reason to influence others (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003). This is evident because all of the studies examining the use of rational persuasion to convince supervisors of an objective found instances in which individuals failed to attain a goal while using rational persuasion. For example, in Keys and Case’s (1990) study, subordinates who argued with their superiors while attempting rational persuasion often failed to achieve their goals. Presumably this is a result of lack of preparation as well as the use of improper tone and language in the attempt. An influencer's tone should always match the target's pitch to avoid aggravating the target and impede discovery of an agent's influence attempt (Cohen & Bradford, 2005; Mowday, 1978). Additionally, an agent should be cognizant of how to use language to share ideas and convince the target (Cohen & Bradford, 2005). For instance, using the word "because" can make someone sound more of an expert on a topic, so the agent sounds more persuasive (The Power to Influence, 2012). Employees should also present benchmarks and cost-benefit analyses to persuade individuals in higher positions to execute at least as well as or better than competitors (Cohen & Bradford, 2005; DuBrin, 2009). For example, an employee could remark on the cost per sale or the revenue per product in comparison to a competitor. Additionally, an employee could mention how much money and resources the company would save if a boss follows the advice of an employee. This would demonstrate to a supervisor that the employee has done sufficient research and has provided persuasive information. However, if a target discovers inaccurate information, it will undermine the argument and an agent's influence attempt, and can lead to the loss of the target's trust (Wells & Kipnis, 2001). While an agent using rational persuasion should not avoid using this tactic for fear of negative repercussions, the individual should be cautious of impairing relationships (Perceptions of Organizational Politics, 1992). Information will appear more factual and reliable when using graphs, data, and testimonies (Cicero, 2016). Also, even when an influencer is trying to promote something of self-interest, it is important to phrase an objective in a manner that appears favorable to the manager and the company (Cohen & Bradford, 2005). Cohen and Bradford (2005) give the example, “Notice the difference between saying that you want your boss to help develop you because it will make you happy, and wanting development because it emphasizes the return on the boss’ investment, which he or she cares a lot about.” This likewise stands as a good example demonstrating the importance of language choice, which will affect the success of the persuasion attempt. The way the information is presented can also determine a favorable outcome. For instance, Kipnis Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980) found that the most frequently used strategy was to “[write] a detailed plan that justified my ideas.” Moreover, Keys and Case (1990) discovered in their research that most reported narratives in which a subordinate influencer used a “presentation of a complete plan, a comparative analysis or quantitative analysis, or documentation of an idea or plan by way of survey, incidents, or interview,” that person would succeed at persuading the superior in the desired outcome. The goal is to present material in such a manner that will win over the approval of one’s target, so that individuals become sympathetic to the argument (Cicero, 2016). Ultimately, the target has free will to choose whether or not to comply with an agent’s desires (Perceptions of Organizational Politics, 1992). As a result, the agent needs to use rational persuasion, a strong and positive tactic, to voluntarily win over a target

(DuBrin, 2009). Additionally, the more persuasive an individual is while utilizing rational persuasion the greater the likelihood of success.

Successful Tactic: Consultation

Although research shows consultation is an effective upward influence tactic, the degree to which one finds success using it differs depending on the study. For example, in Yukl's and Falbe's 1990 study rational persuasion was not the only tactic used in preference to other strategies in upward influence attempts. In the study, 60 participants (made up of employees attending an MBA program and managers engaged in management development courses) were told to explain situations in which they attempted to influence others in higher positions (Yukl & Falbe, 1990). These narratives were then coded and analyzed. The average frequencies in which upward influence tactics were reported by agents were the following: "pressure tactics 1.5, upward appeals 1.6, consultation 3.3, exchange tactics 1.4, coalition tactics 2.3, ingratiating tactics 2.2, rational persuasion 3.3, inspirational appeals 2.5" (Yukl & Falbe 1990). Consultation had a score of 3.3. This means that participants were more likely to engage targets in a task with a target than utilize approaches such as assertiveness and upward appeal. The data also shows that rational persuasion had a score of 3.3. In other words, both rational persuasion and consultation seem to be used equally as frequent in upward influence success cases. In other studies, such as Yukl's and Tracey's (1992) 128 superiors gave feedback and provided examples of their experiences of being influenced by subordinates. In contrast, consultation had a moderately high average frequency, but less than rational persuasion (Yukl & Tracey, 1992). In other words, consultation is another advisable tactic to utilize to influence superiors in an upward direction.

Successful Tactic: Ingratiation

While researchers agree that rational persuasion and consultation are frequently successfully used upward influence tactics, there are varied and contrasting results pertaining to ingratiation in an upward direction. For example, depending on the study, the average frequency of ingratiation, a tactic in which the influencer aims to get the target in a positive mood or think favorably of the influencer prior to making a request or proposal in an upward direction, fluctuates with an average frequency from as high as 3.97 to as low as 2.2 (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Yukl & Tracey, 1992). This variability points to ingratiation as a tactic that should be carefully considered on a case by case basis before being used, since it can either be very helpful or relatively unhelpful in convincing the target. Evidently, more studies focusing on this particular tactic need to be done to assess its value.

Unsuccessful Tactic: Exchange

Exchange in varying studies was revealed to primarily be the most ineffective upward influence tactic, making its use inadvisable for any subordinates who wish to attempt influencing a boss. For example, when Yukl and Falbe (1990) examined 197 self-reports of influence, 60 of which were in an upward direction, exchange tactics were exercised by agents of influence the least frequently out of eight other tactics. Then, in another study in which Yukl and Falbe (1990) asked 237 targets of influence attempts to describe the behavior of subordinates, peers, and superiors, 79 upward influence situations were analyzed. Exchange tactics were again shown to have the lowest average frequency. In other words, Yukl's and Falbe's (1990) research revealed that subordinates do not promise a mutually beneficial exchange often to achieve tasks. A couple of years later Yukl and Tracey (1992) subsequently corroborated the previous research by getting data from 128 superiors on tactics used by managers to influence their decision-making. The study also found exchange to be employed the least and concluded this tactic to be the most ineffective strategy for influencing superiors (Yukl & Tracey, 1992). In the rare occasions when exchange was seen in studies by employees to influence those in higher positions, it was often employed with the intention to receive a personal benefit (Yukl, Guinan, & Sottolano, 1995). Furthermore, exchange would often involve bargaining resources, and then making the target feel indebted to gain further compliance in the future (Waldron, 1999). While every influence attempt depends on the person and the context, every situation should be carefully assessed by the influencer to decide which tactic is appropriate. However, unlike other tactics that show sporadic success, the collective research advises against employing exchange attempts in upward influence, so this tactic is normally not suitable for upward attempts.

Discussion Part Two: Combined Upward Influence Tactics

Achieving Upward Influence with Combined Tactics

Individuals often use a combination of upward influence tactics rather than a single tactic (Yukl, 2006). What's more, studies have revealed that often in situations in which influencers combined two tactics, the agent had greater success than in situations in which the agent used only a single tactic (Yukl, 1989; Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Barry and Shapiro, 1992). For example, combining two soft tactics such as consultation, which evokes a target's empathy, and collaboration, which gains the target's assistance and support in an objective, is far more effective than using only one of these tactics alone (Yukl, 1989). However, the effectiveness of a combination depends on which tactics are grouped together (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Yukl, 1989).

In some cases subordinates unconsciously use multiple influence tactics in one attempt (Keys & Case, 1990). For instance, Key and Case's 1990 study reported incidents of subordinates presenting plans to superiors (rational persuasion), while also unintentionally employing persistence and repetition. Even though accidental combinations of upward influence tactics can lead to desired outcomes, agents should learn which combined tactics are most persuasive**,** so as to become consistently effective in influencing their superiors with a group of tactics and to avoid unintended repercussions.

Successful Combined Tactics: Soft + Rational

Using soft tactics coupled with rational persuasion was more effective than using a single soft tactic or rational persuasion alone. For example, Falbe and Yukl (1992) studied the impact of using single tactics and combinations of tactics for managers in 237 cases of upward influence attempts. All occurrences of influence were described from the point of view of the target, so that the effectiveness of each tactic used alone or in combinations could be analyzed (Falbe & Yukl, 1992). They discovered that rational persuasion and consultation were often paired together in successful upward attempts. This is probably because if a subordinate is presenting a new product idea on a slideshow, getting the target involved in finding a way to implement it during the discussion will enhance the agent's influence and increase the likelihood of compliance. More recently, findings by Higgins, Judge, and Ferris (2003) in their meta-analysis studying influence tactics also indirectly showed that ingratiation (a soft tactic) and rationality led to successful upward influence endeavors, providing further evidence that these tactics used alongside one another are beneficial in upward influence attempts. Thus, combining soft and rational tactics together afford an employee a fair possibility of influencing a supervisor. Additionally, it appears that rational persuasion in particular is a strategy that is compatible with many other tactics.

Unsuccessful Combined Tactics: Hard

A common misconception is that an effective way to influence others is through brazen, assertive, and relentless behavior (DuBrin, 2009). In the case of upward influence, employees do not have the authority to force a supervisor to do something, so influence can come from technical expertise, information, or social capital (Waldron, 1999). When hard tactics are too exaggerated, the result can be intimidating and an influencer will become disliked by managers, especially if regarded as overly generously compensated. Hard influence tactics can generate undesirable results because such behavior can appear as confrontational and inappropriate in the workplace (Castro, Douglas, Hochwater, Ferris, & Frink, 2003). In at least 50 percent of cases involving hard tactics, the agent of influence failed, so unless an employee does not care about the consequences of their actions it is not worth the risk (Keys & Case, 1990). Furthermore, researchers Castro, Douglas, Hochwater, Ferris, and Frink (2003) found that females were more successful at employing hard tactics than men. They proposed two explanations for this. First, women who have a positive disposition and are confident and enthusiastic could possibly be reducing the impact of hard tactics. Second, women may be interpersonally focused whereas men may be task oriented, thus women take into account other perspectives, making their influence attempts with hard tactics more successful. Castro, Douglas, Hochwater, Ferris, and Frink’s (2003) research needs to be expanded upon before more conclusive assessments on the impact of gender on the success of influence tactics are made.

There is in addition one more possible scenario in which hard tactics can lead to desired outcomes. That is when an employee becomes indispensable, developing unusual power over the target (Keys & Case, 1990). However, this is a rare position for any employee to be in and it carries the danger of over-confidence, so it is usually inadvisable to rely on this as the tactics of choice.

Unsuccessful Combined Tactics: Hard + Soft

Combining hard tactics with soft tactics has not been shown to be successful either. For example, forceful pressure and ingratiation could thwart any feelings of companionship between a subordinate and supervisor. By the same token, assertiveness and consultation could undermine trust and make collaboration seem worthless. In addition, in a laboratory experiment testing scenario-based influence attempts, ingratiation was more likely to be successful when not paired with exchange (Barry & Shapiro, 1992). This highlights that combinations of hard and soft tactics decrease the likelihood of a successful influence attempt. If a subordinate is not careful, he or she can undermine influencing efforts by using incompatible tactics.

Discussion Part Three: Limitations

Lack of Research

Unfortunately, in spite of the important role that upward influence plays in organizations, there are a limited number of studies focused on this specific area of influence. In a meta-analysis examining influence research from 2003-2017, only three articles investigated had intentionally and primarily studied upward influence (Lee, Han, Cheong, Kim, & Yun, 2017). Consequently, there is a question as to how strong the validity of any conclusions may be, given that there is some uncertainty as to whether change to influence research would be necessitated by the appearance of new data. Another consequence of the limited amount of research so far undertaken on upward influence is that some tactics for exerting influence have been studied more than others. For instance, while there is adequate data on the effectiveness of rational persuasion, there is a paucity of reliable research with respect to other tactics, such as ingratiation.

Cultural Limitations

This thesis is intended to take the form of a comprehensive review and analysis of material on upward influence. Because the literature reviewed in this thesis was primarily generated in the United States and Canada, there is some question as to the generalizability of the conclusions reached internationally. In reading the limited source material presented in this thesis, the reader must take note that the data is restricted and may only be applicable to organizations within North America.

Discussion Part Four: Future Research

Methodological Considerations

Even though the literature discussed in this thesis was published in trusted journals and produced by knowledgeable researchers, there are a few methodological improvements that can be considered to deepen knowledge on upward influence. While some research studies have compared the strategies carried out in successful and unsuccessful influence incidents, other studies have investigated correlations between questionnaire measures of tactics and measures of managerial performance, commitment, compliance, resistance, etc. None of the correlational studies have looked at both short-term and long-term outcomes as a result of influence behavior. Nor have the incident studies dealt with the problem of inconsistent role expectations and perceptions, causing some managers to be more sensitive to pressures by subordinates than others. Moreover, depending on the study, the number of tactics that can be coded in an influence attempt differs. For instance, in Falbe and Yukl's 1992 study each attempt was limited to no more than two tactics. This simple dichotomy prevented a more complex understanding of upward influence. It is impossible outside of a lab environment to know all the variables affecting an individual's decision. In this regard, it is difficult to isolate the effects of one individual's use of influence from the actions of another and the effects of more than two influence strategies in an attempt (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003; Mowday, 1978). There is also a great disparity in sample sizes, limiting the accuracy and specificity of findings. For these reasons, improvement to methodology needs to happen before more complex models of upward influence are discovered.

Influence Across Cultures

Because of globalization, the world is more interconnected, so employees need to understand the way in which upward influence attempts may change depending on the culture of the target. For example, if an employee is based in New York, New York and works with a manager located in Beijing, China, the subordinate should be able to identify when, how, and which influence tactics should be exercised. Current researchers such as Chaturvedi and Srivastava (2014) as well as McShane and Von Glinow (2005) are concerned that the primary tactics examined in influence research as presented in Table 1 and of this paper, were all witnessed in North America. Researchers are now beginning to take studies conducted in North America and considering their results internationally, enhancing the knowledge of the most frequently used influence tactics, yet constraining the discovery of new forms of influence. For instance, Kennedy, Fu, and Yukl (2003) examined influence tactics across 12 cultures for managers. They found rational persuasion and consultation to be effective around the world, while pressure and appeal tactics were frequently the least successful strategies. This study was based on previous foundational North American research and is non-directionally specific. For that reason, future research on upward influence should take national culture into consideration as well as the direction of influence.

Training Influence

Upward Influence tactics are techniques that can be taught. Going forward, future research should examine if and how corporations train employees in mastering organizational politics, specifically in exerting multi-directional influence to those around them. Companies across the United States already spend millions of dollars each year training their employees. For instance, Bonobos, an e-commerce retail apparel company, offers a course to associate level employees called “How to Manage Up Well,” marking it as a good company to study how effective organizations are at incorporating influence tactics training. Such a study should consider whether, to what extent, and how effective professional development teaches influence tactics, aside from or perhaps within compliance training, onboarding, leadership and executive development, industry-specific training, and management/supervisor training.

Conclusion

Even though there are a number of influence tactics, only a few strategies are fitting for influencers to impact the attitudes, behaviors, and values of supervisors. This thesis supports that for employees attempting to use only a single tactic, rational persuasion is suitable for almost any scenario because of its flexibility and ability to easily learn. Other single tactics that are apparent in situations in which employees successfully influence their bosses are ingratiation and consultation. However, further, extensive empirical research should be carried out to investigate ingratiation to discern why the outcomes vary in different situations. In addition, exchange tactics should be avoided in upward influence since data shows it to be ineffective in affecting the mindset and behaviors of supervisors. If an employee is comfortable exercising multiple tactics, combining soft and rational tactics together has the greatest likelihood of success. For example, rational persuasion used with ingratiation or consultation used with rational persuasion proved to be favorable combinations. However, this thesis highlights that combining incompatible single tactics such as assertiveness and exchange leads to negative repercussions such as irritating a supervisor or miscommunication of one's intention.

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