

Evaluation of managerial influence tactics: A study of Indian bank managers

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Abstract (Document Summary)

To ascertain whether different influence tactics are evaluated the same way, or differently, in downward and upward exercise of influence; and whether appropriateness and effectiveness constitute 2 different dimensions of evaluation, data are collected from 144 bank managers who attended training programs of a leading bank at Ahmedabad, India. Each respondent evaluated a situation description which presented a manager in one situation involving subordinates as influence targets, and the same manager in another situation with a superior as the influence target. Results show that for influencing subordinates, many more tactics are seen as being highly appropriate and effective, than for influencing superiors. Appropriateness and effectiveness emerged as 2 different dimensions of evaluation. Reason emerged as the most appropriate and effective influence tactic. Friendliness is the 2nd most popular approach. Building coalitions or support bases with other members at the workplace, coalitions with union functionaries, and assertiveness enjoy moderate evaluation.

Full Text (3121 words)

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The process of managing entails the exercise of influence upward, downward and laterally in an organization. The upward exercise of influence 1!, particularly leadership, has received a lot of research effort 2-7!; lateral and upward influence processes in organizations have been relatively ignored 8!. As if to reduce this imbalance, the emerging research on influence is increasingly addressed to upward influence 9-14!.

The separation of downward from upward influence in research seems to suggest that the two are qualitatively different processes. However, an integrated and realistic perspective views a manager as holding a position in an organizational network which includes superiors as well as subordinates in the same organizational setting. Research conducted by Kipnis et al. 15! is an example of such an integrated approach which examines the tactics used by managers in downward, upward and lateral influence situations. From factor analysis, Kipnis et al. 15! empirically derived major tactics which were further refined into six strategies An instrument 16! was developed to measure the frequency with which managers employed different influence strategies such as ingratiation, bargaining, reason, assertiveness higher appeal and coalition. Kipnis et al. 17! followed the same approach to study the range of strategies used by managers in England, Australia and the United States. A limitation to this approach was that, being a self-report measure, responses could get contaminated by imperfect memory.

In the present research instead of measuring the frequency of tactic used through recall method as was done in studies reported above, we wanted to study the evaluation of different influence tactics by managers with regard to subordinates and superiors. Our first research question is whether there are differences in the relative evaluation of influence tactics for downward and upward influence situations.

In their study of the influence of sex role stereotypes on the evaluation of male and female supervisory behaviour, Rosen and Jerdee 18! had used bipolar semantic differential scales, namely good-bad, improper-proper, and ineffective-effective, and had summated the respondent ratings on the three scales to derive a single index of the respondent evaluation. In the present research we wanted to explore whether appropriateness and effectiveness are two different dimensions, or do they represent the same evaluatory phenomenon. In other words, we wanted to find out whether managers discriminate between the "appropriateness" of an influence tactic and its "effectiveness". To summarize, in the present study, we wanted to examine the following questions:

(1) Are there any differences in the evaluation of influence tactics in downward compared to the

upward influence attempts?

(2) Are appropriateness and effectiveness of an influence tactic evaluated differently or do managers treat these dimensions as being the same?

METHOD

RESPONDENTS

Data for this study were collected from 144 male bank managers who attended training programmes of a leading bank at Ahmedabad, India. Respondents belonged to the middle level of management. Their mean age was 40.12 years.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

Each respondent was asked to evaluate a situation description which presented a manager in one situation involving subordinates as influence targets, and the same manager in another situation with a superior as the influence target. In both situations the task of the respondent was to evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of eight influence tactics on a seven-point scale.

INSTRUMENT

In order to develop a measure for evaluation of different influence tactics, an instrument similar to the one used by Rosen and Jerdee 18l was developed.

Two situation descriptions "A" and "B" with branch manager as the common influence agent in both, and subordinates as influence targets in A and superior as influence target in B were developed. For generating realistic situations for the exercise of influence downward and upward, branch managers were asked to name three most common problems where a manager had to exercise influence on subordinates, and three situations where the same manager had to influence the superior. A group of 20 branch managers were asked to choose from these the most recurrent problem being faced by managers with regard to their subordinates and superiors. Declining performance was rated as the most common problem requiring influence on the superior. Influencing the subordinates to improve their performance, and influencing the superior to make a favourable decision about shifting the branch to more spacious premises were therefore taken as representative situations. If convinced (i.e. influenced by branch managers), regional managers can and often do take such decisions. Situation descriptions A and B were developed to depict downward and upward influence situations respectively.

To half of the respondents, Situation A was presented first and Situation B followed. To the other half, a reverse order of situations (B followed by A) was presented. (The instrument is available with the author.)

INFLUENCE TACTICS

After each situation description, a range of influence tactics based on the typology developed by Kipnis et al. 15l and used by Schmidt and Kipnis 14l was presented to respondents for evaluation. Statements representing influence tactics of bargaining friendliness, reason, assertiveness, upward appeal and coalition were presented as the influence tactics available to the manager in both the influence situations. The questionnaire was pre-tested on 15 bank managers. Two more influence tactics, namely, appeal to city union leaders and coalition with union functionaries were included on suggestion from the managers.

Each tactic was to be evaluated on a seven-point scale for its appropriateness (highly inappropriate to highly appropriate) and on another seven-point scale for its effectiveness (highly ineffective to highly effective).

FINDINGS

OVERALL EVALUATION OF INFLUENCE TACTICS

At the first level of analysis we wanted to find out the pattern of respondents' evaluation of different tactics at an aggregate level. Results are presented in Table 1. (Table 1 omitted)

DISCUSSION

Reason emerged as the most positively evaluated tactic, followed by friendliness, and coalition with other employees. Coalition with union functionaries, assertiveness and bargaining came next. Appeal to union leaders and upward appeal were evaluated as the least appropriate and effective tactics. The low evaluation of upward appeal speaks a lot about the perceived lack of capability and/or willingness of the senior and top management to help their middle level managers.

For want of comparable studies about evaluation of influence tactics, our results can be compared with the self-reported frequency of the usage. Our results are in broad conformity with the pattern reported by Kipnis et al. 17!. Similar to our findings, Kipnis et al. also found reason to be the most popular tactic, and appeal to higher authority as the least popular tactic for influencing superiors, and the second least popular tactic (the last one was sanction which was not included in our study) for influencing subordinates. If our findings can be interpreted in conjunction with the results reported by Kipnis et al 17!, it appears that the tactic of reason which involves use of facts, and data-based logical arguments holds very high appeal among managers in countries as far apart as India, England, Australia and the United States. Also, appeal to higher authorities, which involves obtaining the support of higher levels in the organization to back up the efforts of a manager, appears to enjoy a low evaluation as an influence tactic across different countries. For other tactics, there appear to be differences in evaluation and usage.

APPROPRIATENESS AND EFFECTIVENESS

In order to answer our next question, we needed to determine whether the respondents' evaluation of the appropriateness of influence tactics differed from their evaluation of effectiveness. Significant two-way interactions in the analysis of variance demonstrated that appropriateness and effectiveness are perceived as two different dimensions ($F(7,980) = 19.98, < 0.01$). Further, there was significant interaction effect between the appropriateness and effectiveness of the influence tactics and the direction (downward or upward) of influence, of $F(7,980) = 2.24, p < 0.05$. The mean ratings under different conditions are presented in Table II. (Table II omitted)

Appropriateness. In order to understand the differences among tactics better, Newman-Kuals' test was carried out. Figure 1 presents the results for appropriateness. (Figure 1 omitted)

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DISCUSSION

Three categories of mean ratings emerged which were labelled as most appropriate, moderately appropriate and least appropriate. Mean differences across categories were statistically significant, and within category were statistically insignificant. Post-hoc comparisons among the eight means by an $\alpha = 0.05$ for the downward situation, and likewise for the upward situation revealed that for the downward exercise of influence, four tactics, namely reason, coalition with employees, friendliness, and coalition with union functionaries were evaluated as being highly appropriate (the differences among those tactics being statistically insignificant). When it came to exercising influence vis-a-vis one's superiors, reason was the only tactic that was viewed as being highly appropriate; the mean ratings for other tactics were much lower. Assertiveness was evaluated as being moderately appropriate for influencing subordinates. In the case of upward influence, four tactics, namely friendliness, coalition with employees, assertiveness, and coalition with the union functionaries fell into this category. Finally, bargaining, appeal to union leaders and appeal to higher management emerged as the least appropriate tactics with regard to influencing subordinates as well as superiors.

EFFECTIVENESS:

As in the case of appropriateness, for effectiveness ratings also, Newman-Kuls' test was carried out. Results are presented in Figure 2. (Figure 2 omitted)

DISCUSSION

The effectiveness of different influence tactics was evaluated differently for exercise of influence downwards and upwards. For influencing subordinates, friendliness, coalition with employees, reason, and coalition with union functionaries were rated as the most effective tactics. These were followed by bargaining and assertiveness which had statistically significant difference in means from tactics in the above category and tactics in the lower category. Appeal to union leaders and appeal to higher management were evaluated as least effective tactics for influencing subordinates.

For the exercise of influence upwards, as the case of appropriateness, only one tactic, namely reason, emerged as the most effective tactic. Friendliness, coalition with employee, coalition with union functionaries and assertiveness were seen as being moderately effective. Appeal to higher management, appeal to union leaders and bargaining were evaluated as the least effective tactics. Comparing Figures 1 and 2, it seems that whereas for influencing one's subordinates several tactics are perceived as being both highly appropriate and effective, for influencing superiors only one tactic, namely reason, is evaluated as being high on both appropriateness and effectiveness. Bargaining appeal to higher authorities and appeal to union leaders are seen as being low on appropriateness as well as effectiveness for downward and upward influence, the only exception being a moderately high evaluation of the effectiveness of bargaining while influencing subordinates. Other tactics are judged as being moderately appropriate and effective in influencing subordinates and superiors.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In the present article we have reported results of a study of different influence tactics in the Indian bank setting. The fact that we drew situation descriptions, action alternatives, are respondents from the banking sector is a limitation of our study which detracts from its generalizability. Yet it is

also a strength partly because the Indian banks with their fast growing size constitute a significant industrial sector and largely because, owing to their intimate familiarity with situation descriptions, our respondents at once identified with the manager as the influence agent. Respondents therefore provided experience-based, rather than merely academic and superficial, evaluations of different influence tactics.

In our study, reason emerged as the most appropriate and effective influence tactic. Although perceived as highly suitable for both subordinates and superiors, reason is evaluated as being much more appropriate and effective with a manager's superiors than with subordinates. Friendliness is the second most popular approach which, though high in both downward and upward situations, is considered to be significantly more appropriate and effective with subordinates than with superiors. Building coalitions or support bases with other members at the workplace, coalitions with union functionaries and assertiveness enjoy moderate evaluation. Bargaining, upward appeal and appeal to union leaders are given low ratings. These differences highlight the efficacy of tactics like reason and friendliness, and limitations of tactics like bargaining and upward appeal in managerial influence situations.

Our next important finding is that given the upward or downward position of the influence target, the appropriateness and effectiveness of different tactics is evaluated differently. While trying to influence subordinates, a manager can select from a range of equally successful tactics like friendliness, coalition and reason which are given high ratings for both appropriateness and effectiveness. For influencing superiors, however, the choice of influence agent appears to be severely restricted: only one tactic, namely reason, emerges as being highly appropriate and effective; the evaluation of other tactics is significantly lower. This result suggests that managers enjoy much greater maneuverability owing to a much broader range of efficacious tactics available while handling subordinates, than in the case of influencing superiors. Future research can further explore this.

In answer to our next question we found that appropriateness and effectiveness are indeed two different dimensions of evaluation. These differences are particularly interesting for tactics like bargaining, upward appeal, and appeal to union leaders, which are evaluated as being high on effectiveness but their rating for appropriateness is low. The implication for theory-building is obvious: the future models of influence processes need to incorporate the appropriateness dimension as an intervening variable to explain better the managerial choices and preferred action alternatives. The perceived effectiveness and probable success as an outcome need not be the only criteria governing managerial evaluation of alternatives; our study has empirically proved the existence of another dimension. Although propriety and ethical considerations are increasingly attracting attention of researchers 19,20!, time has come to explicitly incorporate them into the paradigms exploring managerial choices and behaviour. For practitioners, the study has important implication for management training.

Differences in the perceived efficacy of tactics while exercising influence upward and downward suggests that in competence-building programmes for managers, different tactics need to be emphasized for influencing subordinates and for influencing superiors.

Moreover, the difference between appropriateness and effectiveness highlights the areas of potential managerial dilemmas and conflicts. Which are the tactics that present strong temptation because they are perceived as being high on effectiveness yet their appropriateness is low? To what extent and with reference to which decision areas do managers experience these conflicts? What conflict resolution strategies and mechanisms do they adopt? There are some important issues which need to be researched.

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FURTHER READING

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