An Overview of Upward Influence Tactics

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Abstract

Literature reveals that Upward Influence Tactics is believed to be employed by employees in organizations in order to obtain employers’ approval and receive favorable consequences. According to scholars and researchers, use of appropriate upward influence strategies by subordinates contribute in building a better working relationship with their superiors, which in turn would guarantee them a variety of perquisites, such as promotions, easier interactions and bigger bonuses etc. Surprisingly a comprehensive model detailing all major antecedents and consequences of Upward Influence Tactic is not available in the current body of knowledge. This paper tries to fill this gap in literature by integrating the antecedents and consequences of Upward Influence Tactics. This paper reviews the available literature on Upward Influence Tactics and provides an understanding of the concept in the organizational context. This paper presents origin of the concept, definitional issues, and a conceptual model showing antecedents and consequences of Upward Influence Tactics. It is expected that this paper will encourage further research in the domain and provide pointers to practicing managers who generally desire to be successful in their careers. The study will also provide implication for theory building such that the future models of influence processes need to incorporate appropriate moderators as an intervening variable to explain better managerial choices and preferred action alternatives.

Keywords: Upward Influence Tactics, Career Success

Introduction

Over 40 years ago, Goffman (1955) introduced to the behavioral sciences the notion that people consciously manage the impressions they convey to others in interpersonal interactions. While manipulation was not a new concept at that time, it was indeed a novel argument that people act out roles in efforts to establish identities they wish to
Emergence of the Concept of Upward Influence Tactics
Over 30 years ago, researchers began to identify employees as not simply passive, but rather as proactive participants engaged in active efforts to alter their work environments (Lowin & Craig, 1968). Subsequent research has focused on identifying behaviors used by employees in affecting their environments and target individuals within those contexts (e.g., Hollander & Offermann, 1990; Wortman & Linsenmeier, 1977). A particular set of behaviors that employees use to impact their work environments is Upward Influence, which refers to an agent’s behavior that are directed toward individuals at higher levels in the organizational hierarchy. The literature on Upward Influence has focused on developing taxonomies and measures of Influence Tactics (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990), identifying when agents make Upward Influence attempts (Gardner & Martin, 1988), determining agent’s choice of influence strategies (Liden & Mitchell, 1988), and assessing the effect of Upward Influence behaviors on target reactions (Schilit & Locke, 1982; Yukl & Tracey, 1992).

Definition and Concept
Influence is an attempt made by an agent (individual) to sway the target to a mode/manner of thinking that is in sync with the intentions of the agent. It has been described as "getting one's way" (Kipnis, Schmidt & Wilkinson, 1980). Influence is of two types – downward and upward. The superior’s attempt to affect the subordinate is referred to as downward influence; when there is a reversal of the process it is known as Upward Influence (UI). Deluga and Perry (1991) described UI as an attempt made by the subordinate to secure a desired response from the superior. It is an intentional and strategic choice made by the individual and is directed at someone higher in the organization, who is more powerful (Waldron, 1999).

Influence is often studied under the broader domain of Organizational Politics. Kanter (1979) argues that the connotation of the term influence and politics are more negative than positive. It is often linked with words such as manipulation, subversion, mutual degradation and achievement of goals in improper ways (Drory & Beaty, 1991). On the contrary, Bacharach (2005) argues that organizational politics has
positive effects especially if organizational members have an interest in securing promotions and being acknowledged by their co-workers and employers as a good employee or a talented manager.

**Antecedents of Upward Influence Tactics**

A dispositional view of Upward Influence suggests that some individuals are more likely to engage in Influence behavior because they possess traits that predispose them to engage in such behaviors. The influence of situational factors (for example, organizational culture) on Upward Influence Tactic has received more research attention than the influence of dispositions. Also the decision to engage or not to engage in ingratiatory behavior will be partly determined by the ingratiator's perceptions of target characteristics. Influence has been found to be associated with the formation of LMX and its quality. Next, the direction of the influence attempt (i.e., upward versus lateral versus downward) has also been seen as a potential determinant of Influence Tactics. Recently, organizational scholars have called for increased attention to social and personal effectiveness constructs that might play critical roles in the success of interpersonal interactions in organizations. Such constructs as political skill, self-efficacy and social skill reflect a characteristic tendency or style of behavioral selection, presentation, and execution that influences the way specific behaviors (e.g., Influence Tactics) are perceived, interpreted, and reacted to. Also it has been found that individuals in the later part of middle adulthood now become receivers instead of senders of Influence Tactics.

**Table 1**: Key Antecedents of Upward Influence Tactics

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dispositional Factors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual traits</td>
<td>Allport, 1937; Ferris &amp; Judge, 1991</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locus of control</td>
<td>Hochwater et al., 2000; Ringer &amp; Boss, 2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Machiavellianism</td>
<td>Harrell-Cook et al., 1999; Harrison et al., 1998; Hochwater et al., 2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal Motives</td>
<td>Barbuto et al., 2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>External Motives</td>
<td>Barry &amp; Shapiro, 1992; Kumar &amp; Beyerlaim, 1991</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Situational Factors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Culture</td>
<td>James &amp; White, 1983</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ingratianti's perception of target charact.</td>
<td>Mowday, 1978</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMX</td>
<td>Wayne &amp; Ferris, 1990</td>
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<td>Direction of the</td>
<td>Yukl &amp; Tracey, 1992</td>
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Table 2: Consequences of Upward Influence Tactics

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<tr>
<th>Consequences</th>
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<tr>
<td>Performance Evaluation Process</td>
<td>Cleveland &amp; Murphy, 1992; Villanova &amp; Bernardin, 1991</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
<td>Frink &amp; Ferris, 1998; Huber, Latham, &amp; Locke, 1989</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotions and Salary Increment</td>
<td>Cooper, Graham, &amp; Dyke, 1993; Judge &amp; Bretz, 1994</td>
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| Job Performance                                        | Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Wayne }
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<th>Promotability</th>
<th>Thacker &amp; Wayne, 1995</th>
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<tr>
<td>Career Progression</td>
<td>Judge &amp; Bretz, 1994</td>
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<td>Stress</td>
<td>Hobbes, 1968</td>
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<td>Psychological Empowerment</td>
<td>Dougherty (2004)</td>
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<td>Career Satisfaction</td>
<td>Wolff and Moser (2009)</td>
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**Discussion**

On the basis of a thorough literature survey, this article identifies major organizational antecedents and consequences of Upward Influence Tactics. In contrast to positive effects in the organization, Influence Tactics is also labeled to have negative aspects and outcomes. Upward Influence Tactics appears to be a prime component of the Organizational Politics. Therefore, when approaching an analysis of Upward Influence Tactics in organizations, it is important to try to balance the positive and negative dimensions of organizational politics. Recent support for this view was suggested by Fedor et.al (2008) who demonstrates how positive and negative organizational politics represent separate dimensions, rather than the two poles of the same continuum.
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research
The present literature review is based on prior empirical studies majority of which were based on the USA organizations; some are based on Netherlands, United Kingdom, Canada, China. Therefore, the antecedents and consequences of Upward Influence Tactic which are highlighted in this study might be more effective in the western context but might not be directly generalisable in developing countries. The model developed here is based on the articles/ empirical studies that the author managed to collect or download. Though a good number of articles were reviewed, this is not the exclusive list. There may be some other important studies which were overlooked and hence not reviewed. Hence further review based on more in-depth analysis might reveal more knowledge about antecedents and consequences of Upward Influence. Further research should identify some other antecedents and consequences. So further research is recommended to confirm the findings of the study and the model developed.

References
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