

Gendered Influence: Differences in the Perceived Use of Influence Tactics

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to understand the role of gender congenial workplaces, as well as the role of gender of the agent and the target, in the perceived use of downward influence tactics. The researcher selected 40 organisations assumed to be gender congenial to females, and 40 organisations assumed to be gender congenial to males. Five employees reporting to a single leader, served as sample respondents from each organisation, making a total of 400 employee respondents for the study. The sample respondents were administered a questionnaire, comprising of demographic details, and a measure of downward influence tactics. Findings reveal significant differences in the perceived use of downward influence tactics between male- and female-congenial workplaces. Male and female employees significantly differ in their leader's perceived use of influence tactics. Also, male and female leaders are seen as differing significantly in their use of downward influence tactics.

Keyword: Gender, Downward Influence Tactics, Leadership, Organisational Context

Introduction

Leadership appears to be one of the most sought after topics for researchers and psychologists alike (Bass, 1990). Tremendous research efforts have been manifested in ways in which leader's effectiveness is ascertained. There are diverse factors that determine the effectiveness of leaders, making it impossible for the leader to integrate them all into his/her repertory (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). Leader behaviours typically involve the process of influence between the leader and the subordinates. One of the indices of leader's effectiveness, is indeed

the influence behaviours that the leader engages in, when interacting with the subordinates (Yukl, 2012).

Influence has been described as a process of bringing about a change in an individual's attitudes, and behaviours (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1990). The process of influence requires an agent, who is the source of influence; and the target, upon whom the influence is exerted. The concept of power is related to leadership since it is the base of the influence process. An agent's choice of influence behaviours will be based on his/her evaluation of the power that the target holds (Yukl, 1989).

The original taxonomy of proactive influence tactics by Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980) featured six influence tactics: assertiveness, rationality, ingratiation, exchange, upward appeals, and coalitions. Yukl and Falbe (1990) & Yukl and Tracey (1992) further identified additional tactics of inspirational appeals, legitimating, consultation, pressure, and personal appeals. Yukl, Chavez, and Seifert, (2005) recently identified collaboration and appraising as distinct from the nice proactive tactics identified in earlier research.

Past studies have reported directional differences in the use of influence tactics, where managers in an organisation differ in their choice of influence tactics toward subordinates (downward influence tactics), peers (lateral influence tactics), and supervisors (upward influence tactics) (Yukl, Falbe, & Youn, 1993). However, more than the direction of influence, choice of influence tactics is more often determined by the objectives to be met. Yukl and Falbe (1990) found that the choice of influence tactics by managers within an organisation is dependent on the objectives that they pursue, that is, whether the compliance is gained to meet personal objectives or organisational objectives.

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Gender of the leader emerged as a significant predictor of the influence tactics used. van Knippenberg & Steensma (2003) in a study indicated that men employed more influence than women. This finding is already in tune with the earlier work of Instone, Major and Bunker (1983) that revealed female leaders as using fewer influence attempts and a limited range of influence tactics. Furthermore, women leaders have been rated as using more pressure tactics than men leaders (Barbuto, Jr., Fritz, Matkin, & Marx, 2007; Instone *et al.*, 1983). This is contrary to earlier research which posits that differential gender expectations from male and female leaders, get revealed in actual sex differences in the use of influence tactics. DuBrin (1991) and Johnson (1976) reveal that men were expected to use direct tactics and women, to use indirect tactics for influencing others in getting the work done. However, recently Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and van Engen (2003) in a meta-analysis indicate that women leaders differ from men leaders in the styles that they use, and the styles they use emerged as more effective in leading others. Research in the past has produced mixed findings. Apart from taking into consideration the gender of the agent, differences have also been observed in influence attempts toward male and female targets. Any investigation toward influence tactics, should take into account the gender of the agent as well as the target, although there are various moderating factors that affect the choice and frequency of influence tactics.

The organisational context has a role to play in the choice and success of influence attempts by the leaders of the organisation. Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995) point out that organisations can be more congenial to male leaders (such as the military organisations) or more congenial to female leaders (like in the nursing profession). Research evidence indicates that a politically skilled leader is the need of the hour in a typical military setting where the leader has to meet the demands of adapting to changing situations and parallel to that, maintain a good reputation (Nelson, Armstrong, Condie, & Quick, 2012, p.185). Much of the research on influence behaviours adopted by the leader in an organisation has been generated from managers in the corporate world. Generalising the tactics used by managers on the educational leader, or a leader in the police force, would be an unsuccessful attempt. There is a dearth of research on the role of organisational contexts on the choice of influence tactics. Furthermore, organisational contexts can be sub-divided into those that are congenial for males, or females, or both.

On the backdrop of the research generated on the effect of gender on the use of downward influence tactics, the present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To ascertain whether gender of the leader results in a perceived difference in the use of influence tactics,
- ii. To ascertain whether gender of the target (employee) results in a perceived difference in the leaders' use of influence tactics, and
- iii. Whether male-congenial and female-congenial workplaces differ in leaders' perceived use of influence tactics.

Method

Sample

In order to meet the objectives of the present study, the researcher selected 40 organisations assumed to be more congenial to males (i.e. 20 organisations within corporate sector and 20 organisations within law enforcement sector); and 40 organisations assumed to be more congenial to females (i.e. 20 organisations within development sector and 20 organisations within education sector), thus, making a total of 80 sample organisations located within Vadodara district. As per the requirement of the study, five employees reporting directly to a single leader were drawn as sample respondents from each organisation, making a total of 100 employees under each sector. Hence, adding the employees of all the four sectors makes the total sample size of 400 employees for the present study.

Measures

A questionnaire was prepared by the researcher that comprised of two sections:

Section A: It comprised preliminary information of the employee respondent's age, gender, educational qualification, work experience details, and gender and designation of the leader.

Section B: For measuring perceived use of downward influence tactics, the Downward Influence Strategies Scale recently adopted and used by Nag, Nongmaithem & Tripathi (2008) was used for the present study. Items in this scale were drawn from various sources available in the literature (Falbo, 1977; Kipnis *et al.*, 1980). 33 items were

drawn from the Scale measuring the downward influence tactics of assertion, rationality, exchange of benefits, expertise, ingratiation, personalised relations, and use of sanctions- positive and negative. Sample respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale (Always-Never) the ways in which their current leader goes about influencing the subordinates to get some task done. The psychometric properties of the downward influence tactics are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptions of Downward Influence Tactics

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Number of items</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Cronbach Alpha</i>
Downward Influence Tactics	33		
Rationality	5	5-25	0.68
Ingratiation	5	5-25	0.75
Exchange of Benefits	4	4-20	0.73
Expertise	4	4-20	0.58
Personalised Relations	2	2-10	0.45
Assertion	5	5-25	0.59
Use of Sanctions- positive	4	4-20	0.50
Use of Sanctions- negative	4	4-20	0.78

Procedure

Official permission was sought from heads of the sample organisations drawn for the study. The employee respondents of these sample organisations were given the questionnaire packet, and requested to read through the instructions carefully. After filling up the preliminary information, the respondents were required to indicate their answers on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5(Always) to 1(Never).

Results and Discussions

The data were subjected to SPSS package 21 for carrying out analysis. In order to test the objectives of the study in identifying the role of gender in the differential use of downward influence tactics, independent t test was carried out. The results are further discussed in the following sections.

Perceived Use of Downward Influence Tactics of Male and Female Leaders

In order to find out whether male and female leaders are perceived as engaging in a differential use of downward

Table 2 Mean Differences, S.D Values and 't' Score of Male and Female Leaders on Downward Influence Tactics

<i>Downward Influence Tactics</i>	<i>Male leaders (n=310)</i>	<i>Female leaders (n=90)</i>	<i>t score</i>
	Mean	Mean	
Assertion	16.46 (4.17)	15.44 (4.03)	2.04*
Exchange of benefits	8.60 (4.32)	8.26 (3.70)	0.68
Expertise	13.02 (3.76)	12.08 (3.19)	2.13*
Rationality	17.93 (4.09)	17.22 (3.94)	1.47
Ingratiation	19.10 (4.11)	19.51 (3.37)	-0.86
Personalised Relations	5.37 (2.24)	5.38 (2.12)	-0.04
Use of sanctions-negative	7.84 (3.77)	7.27 (3.09)	1.31
Use of sanctions- positive	11.10 (2.74)	10.56 (2.70)	1.62

**P<0.01, *P<0.05

Note: S.D. in parentheses

influence tactics, independent t test was carried out. Table 2 displays the results of the analysis. As seen in Table 2, there is a significant difference in the perceived use of downward influence tactics of assertion and expertise between male and female leaders. As indicated by the mean differences, male leaders were perceived as employing assertion and expertise to a greater degree as compared to the female leaders.

Assertion

Male leaders were found to be perceived as employing the downward influence tactic of assertion to a greater degree as compared to their female counterparts. In using assertion as a downward influence tactic to gain compliance from subordinates, male leaders receive more favourable evaluations as opposed to the female leaders. Female leaders who practice assertion are seen as violating the expected status order of gender (Ridgeway, 2001), which is so deep rooted in the Indian system of social practices. Correll and Ridgeway (2003) proposed the Expectation Status Theory that links culturally assigned status to explain how stereotypes are assigned to certain groups of people within an organisation. Females, for decades have occupied subordinate positions on the domestic front as well as the work front. Therefore, their positions are attributed with traits (for instance, warmth, compassion and submission) that assist them in performing their role of subordinate positions. Males on the other hand, have for decades, dominated the leadership positions. Their positions therefore have been attributed with more of agentic traits, which will assist them in their leadership roles. Male leaders are therefore expected to use assertions in their behaviours, and female leaders are not expected to use assertions in their leader behaviors. Use of assertions by female leaders would contradict their status role characteristics. Therefore, in actuality female leaders may resort to use assertion to a lesser degree because it reduces their ability to gain compliance.

Expertise

Male leaders are perceived by the employee respondents as using expertise to a greater degree as compared to their female counterparts. Expertise in a field is generally acquired by updating oneself upon recent advances in knowledge relevant to the field and engaging in a continual process of educating oneself. Expertise is

not only indicated by the qualifications and awards of an individual, but also by his/her ability to solve real life problems. Prime, Carter and Welbourne (2009) in a study indicated that male leaders emerged as more effective in problem solving tasks, as compared to their female counterparts. This generates support to this study finding where male leaders are perceived as engaging in more expertise behaviours to influence subordinates as compared to female leaders.

A probable explanation to this finding however could be based on Correll and Ridgeway's (2003) Expectation Status Theory, where females, within an organisation generally possess lower levels of status and power than males do. Different types of qualities are attributed to people occupying different positions in organisations. Males (mostly in leadership positions) are attributed with more agentic traits, and females, mostly at lower status and power positions, are attributed with more communal traits of warmth and compassion (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). If ever, females do rise to the high status and power positions of leadership, this shift in position does not necessarily lead to a shift in the patterns of attribution. As a result, female leaders are assumed to display communal attributes and male leaders assumed to be more competent and knowledgeable (Carli, 2001). Therefore, this very well supports the findings of the study that male leaders are perceived as engaging in more expertise behaviours to influence their subordinates.

In general, we find that male leaders are seen as engaging in more influence behaviours as compared to their female counterparts. The ability of a leader to influence the subordinates is largely a function of subordinates' perception of power of the leader. Although gender differences in organisations in the guise of wage differences and promotion discriminations are on a decline; male leaders in the same positions as female leaders, are perceived as having more power in an organisational set-up (Lyness & Thompson, 2000).

Perceptions of Leaders' Use of Influence Tactics by Male and Female Employees

In order to find out whether male and female employees differ in the perceptions of their leaders' use of influence tactics, independent t test was performed. Table 3 displays the mean differences, S.D. scores and level of significance. As seen in Table 3, male and female

Table 3 Mean Differences, S.D Values and ‘t’ Score of Male and Female Employees on Leader’s Perceived use of Downward Influence Tactics

<i>Downward Influence Tactics</i>	<i>Male employees (n=233)</i>	<i>Female employees (n=123)</i>	<i>t score</i>
	Mean	Mean	
Assertion	16.97 (3.98)	14.56 (4.08)	5.51**
Exchange of benefits	9.03 (4.37)	7.39 (3.49)	3.66**
Expertise	13.20 (3.67)	11.93 (3.48)	3.23**
Rationality	18.05 (4.17)	17.15 (3.76)	2.05*
Ingratiation	18.08 (4.53)	17.02 (4.29)	2.19*
Personalised Relations	5.46 (2.27)	5.18 (2.07)	1.16
Use of sanctions-negative	8.12 (3.78)	6.80 (3.09)	3.40**
Use of sanctions- positive	11.18 (2.84)	10.51 (2.44)	2.28*

**P<0.01, *P<0.05

Note: S.D. in parentheses

employees significantly differ in the perceptions of their leaders’ use of the influence tactics of assertion, exchange of benefits, expertise, ingratiation, rationality, and use of sanctions- positive and negative. Earlier studies have reported a significant difference in the use of hard tactics and soft tactics when taking into consideration the gender of the target. For instance, male employees reported an increased use of hard and direct tactics from their leaders; and female employees reported an increased use of soft influence tactics from their leaders (Moss, Barbuta, Jr., Matkin, & Chin, 2005). However, contrary to the popular findings, the present study indicates a significant difference between male and female employees in their leaders’ perceived use of both hard and soft tactics.

Looking at the mean differences (Table 3), a common trend that emerges is that male employees report a greater use of influence attempts by their leaders, as compared to the female employees. Also, as revealed in table 2, male leaders are perceived as using more of influence attempts toward their subordinates as compared to female leaders. Thus, integrating the findings from Table 2 and 3, the study reaffirms that “men are thought to be more

influential, and women more easily influenced” (Eagly, 1983, p.971).

No significant difference in the leaders’ use of personalised relations as an influence attempt has been reported by male and female employees. Personalised relation is classified as a soft influence tactic that the leader employs to influence subordinates, based on liking and friendliness. Recent research (Tripathi & Tripathi, 2001; Yukl, Fu, & McDonald, 2003) has indicated toward a lesser preference and low effectiveness of personalised relations as an influence attempt. This finding very well explains no marked use of personalised relations as an influence tactic as perceived by employees of this study.

Perceptions of Downward Influence Tactics Across Male- and Female-congenial Workplaces

In order to find out differences in perceptions of downward influence tactics across male- and female-congenial workplaces, independent t test was performed. Table 4 displays the mean differences, S.D. scores and level of significance. Findings reveal that male- and

Table 4 Mean, S.D. and t Score of Male- and Female-Congenial Workplaces on Perceived Use of Downward Influence Tactics

<i>Downward Influence Tactics</i>	<i>Male-congenial workplaces (n=40)</i>	<i>Female-congenial workplaces (n=40)</i>	<i>t score</i>
	Mean	Mean	
Assertion	17.10 (4.01)	15.36 (4.13)	4.28**
Exchange of benefits	8.82 (4.30)	8.24 (4.05)	1.37
Expertise	13.32 (3.66)	12.30 (3.58)	2.82**
Rationality	18.24 (3.89)	17.31 (4.19)	2.28*
Ingratiation	17.82 (4.52)	17.69 (4.44)	0.30
Personalised Relations	5.22 (2.23)	5.53 (2.19)	1.40
Use of sanctions-negative	7.81 (3.59)	7.62 (3.67)	0.52
Use of sanctions- positive	11.03 (2.71)	10.93 (2.77)	0.36

**P<0.01, *P<0.05

Note: S.D. in parentheses

female-congenial workplaces significantly differ in perceptions of downward influence tactics of assertion, expertise, and rationality. The mean differences in Table 4 indicate that male-congenial workplaces show an increased use of these influence tactics. Furthermore, the standard deviation scores (Table 4) reveal lesser variation in the use of influence tactics across male- and female-congenial workplaces. Implications of the study thus propose that although male-congenial workplaces show a definite and marked use of tactics of assertion, expertise and rationality; female-congenial workplaces reveal no marked use of influence tactics that could be characteristic to that particular organisational context.

Conclusion

As expected, gender plays a significant role in the perceived use of influence tactics by leaders of Indian organisations. While male leadership is still perceived in stereotypical ways, perceptions of female leader-influence behaviours have moved away from the use of soft influence tactics, toward an undifferentiated style. Also, while male-congenial workplaces highlight on an

increased use of specific influence tactics of assertion, expertise and rationality; female-congenial workplaces are not marked with any specific strategies used. In addition to gender, research on influence tactics needs to focus on the organisational context because the choice of influence tactics is not only based on the social role theory; but also on the structural theory that determines the choice of influence behaviours based on position and power dynamics within the organisation.

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