Power and Interdependence in Organizations

Edited by
DEAN TJOSVOLD
AND
BARBARA WISSE

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12 | *Power and the interpersonal influence of leaders*

GARY YUKL

To be effective, a leader must influence people to carry out requests, support proposals, and implement decisions. In large organizations, the effectiveness of most managers depends on influence over superiors and peers as well as influence over subordinates (Kotter 1985). Two types of constructs that have dominated theory and research on interpersonal influence in organizations are power and influence tactics. This chapter will explain how leaders use influence tactics to accomplish their job responsibilities and how their personal and position power can enhance their effectiveness.

Power and influence outcomes

Power has been defined in many different ways, and there is disagreement about the best way to define and measure it. In this chapter, interpersonal power means the potential influence of one person (the "agent") over the attitudes and behavior of one or more other people (the "targets"). This definition emphasizes potential influence rather than influence behavior or outcomes and specified targets rather than general influence in the organization. It is difficult to describe the power of an agent without specifying the target person(s), the influence objectives, and the time period (Yukl 2006). An agent will have more power over some people than over others and more influence for some types of issues than for others. Furthermore, an agent's power may change over time as conditions change or the effects of an agent's decisions become evident (Hollander 1980; Pfeffer 1981).

Outcomes of influence attempts

Power provides potential influence, but overt attempts to exert power do not necessarily result in the agent's intended outcome. To assess the effects of an influence attempt, it is useful to differentiate among three

distinct outcomes (Yukl 2006). Commitment occurs when the target person internally agrees with a decision or request from the agent and makes a concerted effort to carry out the request or implement the decision effectively. Compliance occurs when the target is willing to do what the agent asks but is apathetic about it and will make only a minimal effort. Resistance occurs when the target person is opposed to the agent's proposal or request and tries to avoid carrying it out (e.g., by refusing, by making excuses, delaying action, or seeking to have the request changed). Target commitment is usually considered to be the most favorable outcome, but sometimes compliance is all that is needed to accomplish the agent's objectives.

Power and influence outcomes

Most studies on the implications of power for leadership effectiveness find that leader expert and referent power are positively correlated with subordinate satisfaction and performance (Yukl 2006). The results for legitimate, reward, and coercive power are inconsistent, and many of the correlations with criteria of leadership effectiveness are negative or non-significant rather than positive. Overall, the results suggest that effective leaders rely more on expert and referent power to influence subordinates. However, the field survey research probably underestimates the utility of position power, especially when compliance is an acceptable outcome.

Only a few studies have related power to commitment, compliance, and resistance outcomes. Warren (1968) found that expert, referent, and legitimate power were correlated positively with attitudinal commitment by subordinates, whereas reward and coercive power were correlated with behavioral compliance. In a study by Thambain and Gemmill (1974), the primary reason given for compliance was the leader's legitimate power, and reward power was also an important reason for compliance, even though neither type of power was associated with commitment. Yukl and Falbe (1991) found that legitimate power was the most common reason given for compliance with requests from a boss, even though it was not correlated with task commitment.

The consequences of having power depend greatly on how it is used. Effective leaders are likely to use both personal and position power in a subtle, careful fashion that minimizes status differentials and avoids threats to the target person's self esteem. In contrast, leaders who

exercise power in an arrogant, manipulative, domineering manner are likely to engender resentment and resistance (Yukl 2006).

Optimal amount of power

It is obvious that leaders need some power to be effective, but the amount of overall power that is necessary for effective leadership and the mix of different types of power are questions that research has only begun to answer. Clearly the optimal amount of power will depend on what needs to be accomplished and on the leader's skill in using what power is available. Less power is needed by someone who has the skills to use power effectively and who recognizes the importance of concentrating on essential objectives. More influence is necessary when major changes are needed, but there is likely to be strong initial opposition to them. In this situation, an agent needs sufficient power to persuade people that change is necessary and desirable, or to actually implement changes to demonstrate they are effective.

In general, a moderate amount of position power seems optimal for most situations (Yukl 2006). Some coercive power is necessary to buttress legitimate and expert power when a manager needs to influence compliance with rules and procedures that are unpopular but necessary to do the work and avoid serious accidents. Likewise, coercive power is needed to restrain or banish rebels and criminals who would otherwise disrupt operations, steal resources, or harm other members. However, too much position power may be as detrimental as too little. A manager with extensive position power may be tempted to rely on it instead of developing personal power and using influence tactics that are likely to elicit target commitment. The idea that power corrupts is especially relevant for position power, but it also applies to personal power. A person with extensive expert and referent power (e.g., charismatic leader) may be tempted to act in ways that will eventually lead to failure (Zaleznik 1970).

Types of proactive influence tactics

Power provides potential influence, but some researchers have been more interested in studying the specific types of behavior used to exercise influence. The type of behavior used in an effort to influence the attitudes and behavior of another person is called an influence tactic.

When a request is clearly legitimate, relevant for the work, and some-thing the target person knows how to do, then it is often possible to gain target compliance by using a simple, polite request. However, when target resistance is more likely, then the agent may need to use proactive influence tactics.

Proactive influence tactics have an immediate task objective, such as getting the target person to carry out a new task, change work procedures, provide assistance on a project, or support a proposed change. Proactive tactics can be differentiated from impression manage-ment tactics, which are used to influence how targets view the agent (e.g., friendly, talented, reliable, powerful). However, an agent's choice of proactive tactics can subsequently affect the agent–target relationship and the agent's power.

Proactive influence tactics can be studied with several research meth-ods, including coding of qualitative descriptions of influence behavior (e.g., from critical incidents or diaries), manipulation of influence tactics in laboratory experiments (e.g., with actors, role-play exercises, or scenarios), and manipulation of influence behavior in field experiments (e.g., with feedback and training). The method used most often to study proactive influence tactics is a behavior-description questionnaire. Since 1980, two different questionnaires were developed for survey research on proactive influence tactics.

Profiles of organizational influence strategies

Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980) collected descriptions of suc-cessful and unsuccessful influence attempts, and the researchers ana-lyzed these critical incidents to identify specific types of influence tactics. Based on their findings, the researchers developed a self-report agent questionnaire called the Profiles of Organizational Influence Strategies (POIS) to measure eight influence tactics. Schriesheim and Hinkin (1990) later conducted a factor analysis of the POIS using data from samples of agents who indicated how often they used each type of tactic in upward influence attempts with their boss. The factor analysis pro-vided support for six of the proposed tactics (i.e. rationality, exchange, ingratiation, assertiveness, coalition, and upward appeal), but not for the other two tactics (blocking and sanctions). The revised agent POIS with six tactic scales was tested in a later study which also involved upward influence (Hochwarter et al. 2000). The results provided only

limited support for the tactic scales. The scale reliabilities were low for some samples, and some of the fit statistics for the confirmatory factor analysis were outside the acceptable range.

Both the original and revised versions of the agent POIS have been used in many studies on the determinants and consequences of proactive tactics (e.g., Deluga 1988; Schmidt and Kipnis 1984; Thacker and Wayne 1995; Vecchio and Sussmann 1991; Wayne et al. 1997). However, only a few studies (e.g., Erez et al. 1986; Kipnis et al. 1980) used the POIS to measure how the tactics are used by a leader to influence subordinates or peers. As yet there is little evidence that the scales can accurately measure influence behavior with subordinates or peers. One obvious limitation of the POIS is reliance on agent self-reports of influence behavior. Self-reports of behavior are seldom as accurate as ratings of a person's behavior by other people. Another limitation is the failure to include scales for some proactive tactics that the literature on leadership and power suggests are likely to be important for managers and professionals (e.g., consultation, inspirational appeals, legitimating).

Influence behavior questionnaire

Unlike the POIS, the Influence Behavior Questionnaire (IBQ) was developed as a target questionnaire. The early version of the IBQ included scales for six tactics which are similar to ones in the POIS (rational persuasion, exchange, ingratiation, pressure, coalition, and upward appeals), but new items were developed for these scales rather than merely revising agent items from the POIS. The IBQ also included scales to measure four additional tactics (consultation, inspirational appeals, personal appeals, and legitimating). Early validation research provided support for nine of the ten tactics (Yukl and Tracey 1992). The factor analysis for data from target subordinates and peers indicated that upward appeals were viewed as just another form of coalition tactic, so these two scales were combined. The nine-tactic version of the target IBQ was used in several studies on antecedents and consequences of proactive tactics (e.g., Barbuto and Scholl 1999; Gravenhorst and Boonstra 1998; Douglas and Gardner 2004; Yukl and Tracey 1992). The IBQ was later revised and extended to include two additional tactics. Research with surveys, incidents, and lab experiments verified that the eleven tactics are distinct and meaningful for managers and

Table 12.1 Definition of the eleven proactive influence tactics.

Rational persuasion: using logical arguments and factual evidence to show a proposal or request is feasible and relevant for attaining important task objectives.

Apprising: explaining how carrying out a request or supporting a proposal will benefit the target personally or help advance the target's career.

Inspirational appeals: appealing to values and ideals, or seeking to arouse the target's emotions, to gain commitment for a request or proposal.

Consultation: encouraging the target to suggest improvements in a proposal or to help plan an activity or change that requires the target person's support and assistance.

Collaboration: offering to provide relevant resources and assistance if the target will carry out a request or approve a proposed change.

Ingratiation: using praise and flattery before or during an influence attempt, or expressing confidence in the target's ability to carry out a difficult request.

Personal appeals: asking the target to carry out a request or support a proposal out of friendship, or asking for a personal favor before saying what it is.

Exchange: offering an incentive, suggesting an exchange of favors, or indicating the willingness to reciprocate at a later time if the target will do what the agent requests.

Coalition tactics: enlisting the aid of others to persuade the target to do something, or citing the support of others as a reason for the target to agree.

Legitimating tactics: establishing the legitimacy of a request by referring to rules, policies, contracts, prior agreements, or precedent.

Pressure: making demands or threats, using persistent reminders, or checking frequently on compliance in order to influence the target to carry out a request.

professionals (Yukl et al. 2005; Yukl et al. 2008). The eleven proactive tactics are listed and defined in Table 12.1.

Effectiveness of proactive tactics

Yukl and Tracey (1992) proposed a model to predict the outcomes of using different influence tactics. A tactic is more likely to be successful if the target perceives it to be a socially acceptable form of influence behavior, if the agent has sufficient position and personal power to use the tactic, if the tactic has the capability to affect target attitudes

about the desirability of the request, if it is used in a skillful way, and if it is used for a request that is legitimate and consistent with target values and needs. The effectiveness of a tactic also depends on the influence objective and the other tactics used in an influence attempt.

Individual tactics

The relative effectiveness of different proactive influence tactics has been examined in several studies (e.g., Yukl et al. 1996; Yukl et al. 2008; Yukl and Tracey 1992; Yukl et al. 2005). The number of studies on outcomes of using the tactics is small, but similar results were found for different research methods. The results suggest that the most effective tactics (called "core tactics") for influencing target commitment are rational persuasion, consultation, collaboration, and inspirational appeals (Yukl 2006).

Exchange and apprising are moderately effective for influencing subordinates and peers, but these tactics are difficult to use for proactive influence attempts with bosses. Both tactics require resources or information that a boss is more likely to possess than a subordinate. Ingratiation is sometimes useful in an influence attempt with a subordinate or peer, but it is likely to appear manipulative when used with a boss. Ingratiation is usually more effective as part of a long-term strategy for building cooperative relations than to gain compliance with an immediate request.

Personal appeals can be useful for influencing a target person with whom the agent has a friendly relationship. However, this tactic is only relevant for certain types of requests (e.g., to get assistance, to get a personal favor, to change a scheduled meeting), and it is more likely to result in target compliance than in commitment. Pressure and legitimating tactics are not likely to result in target commitment, but these tactics are sometimes useful for eliciting compliance, which may be an acceptable outcome for the influence attempt. Coalition tactics are seldom used to influence subordinates, but sometimes they can be effective for influencing a peer or boss to support a change or innovation, especially if the coalition partners use the core tactics.

Overall, the findings in the research are consistent with the proposition that each tactic can be useful in an appropriate situation. Some tactics tend to be more effective than others, but the best tactics do not always result in task commitment and the worst tactics do not always

result in resistance. The outcome of any particular influence attempt is affected strongly by other factors in addition to the type of influence tactics used by the agent (e.g., agent power, the influence objective, the perceived importance of the request, the agent–target relationship, cultural values and beliefs about the proper use of the tactics). How a tactic is actually used is another determinant of its effectiveness. For example, a strong form of rational persuasion (e.g., a detailed proposal, elaborate documentation) is more effective than a weak form of rational persuasion (e.g., a brief explanation, an assertion without supporting evidence). Any tactic can result in resistance if it is not used in a skillful manner, or if it is used for a request that is improper or unethical (Yukl 2006).

Tactic combinations

Influence attempts often involve more than one type of proactive influence tactic. To investigate this question requires a method such as critical incidents or experiments, and only a few studies have examined tactic combinations (e.g., Barry and Shapiro 1992; Case et al. 1988; Falbe and Yukl 1992). Nevertheless, some tentative conclusions can be drawn from the available research. The effectiveness of a combination seems to depend in part on the potency of the individual tactics and how compatible they are with each other. Compatible tactics are easy to use together, and they are likely to improve the influence outcome. For example, rational persuasion is a very flexible tactic that is usually compatible with any of the other tactics. Pressure tactics are likely to be incompatible with personal appeals or ingratiation. When multiple tactics are used in the same influence attempt, the effectiveness also depends on how they are sequenced (see Yukl 2006). Knowing how to successfully combine different influence tactics appears to require considerable insight and skill.

Tactic meta-categories

Some researchers have attempted to group the specific tactics into broadly defined meta-categories. One example is the dichotomy between "hard" versus "soft" tactics (e.g., Van Knippenberg and Steensma 2003). Another example is a taxonomy that adds a third meta-category called "rational tactics" (e.g., Deluga 1992; Falbe and

Yukl 1992; Farmer et al. 1997). Sometimes the classification of specific tactics into meta-categories is based entirely on the judgment of the researchers, and they do not always agree as to whether a specific tactic is hard, soft, or rational. Farmer et al. (1997) used confirmatory factor analysis to test competing models for tactic meta-categories, but the results were weak and inconclusive. The researchers only included the six tactics in the revised agent POIS, and the data only involved upward influence. In research with the IBQ that included a wider variety of specific tactics and target ratings by subordinates and peers as well as bosses, a two- or three-factor model did not get much support (Yukl et al. 2005).

Most researchers who use the hard versus soft meta-categories do not provide a clear rationale for them. Each meta-category should be firmly grounded in a theoretical framework involving different influence processes or mediated effects. Studies on the effects of soft versus hard tactics usually find that only the soft tactics are related to favorable outcomes such as target commitment or satisfaction with the agent. One possible explanation for this finding is that soft tactics involve intrinsic motivation and hard tactics involve extrinsic motivation. Another possible explanation is that soft tactics increase target empowerment and hard tactics reduce it. The two explanations are not mutually exclusive, and to date there has been only a limited effort to verify them.

Meta-categories have several limitations (Yukl and Chavez 2002). When the component tactics in a meta-category are not all related to outcomes (or antecedents) in the same way, and analyses are conducted only for the meta-categories, then these differences will be obscured. The researchers who have used meta-categories seldom report the results for the specific tactics or check to determine if results are consistent for tactics in the same meta-category. For example, exchange and pressure are both regarded as hard tactics by some researchers, but they have somewhat different consequences. Another limitation is that several of the proactive tactics have both harder and softer forms, and this diversity within the tactics is ignored when the tactics are classified simply as either hard or soft. For example, rational persuasion can be done in a very assertive way (e.g., challenging the target's information or reasons for resisting), or in a softer way (e.g., presenting information about different options and letting the target draw the logical conclusion about which is the best one).

Influencer types

Some researchers have advocated that the profile of scores for different tactics can be used to classify people into different influencer types. Kipnis and Schmidt (1988) conducted a cluster analysis of their data and found four influencer types that they labeled shotgun, bystander, tactician, and ingratiator. Farmer and Maslyn (1999) later conducted a partial replication of the study that included some measures of agent attributes that may help to explain the profiles.

The idea that there are different influencer types is worth exploring, but these two studies both have serious limitations (Yukl and Chavez 2002). The researchers failed to rule out the possibility that the profiles indicated by the cluster analysis merely reflect different response biases. The "shotgun" managers had high scores on all tactics, whereas the "bystander" managers had low scores on all tactics. The shotgun profile may be an artifact of a respondent bias to use high scores in ratings on questionnaires involving power and influence, whereas the bystander profile may reflect a bias to use low scores. The credibility of this alternate interpretation is supported by a consistent pattern of scores for these two influencer types on some other self-report measures used by Farmer and Maslyn (1999), such as the perceived power of the boss and the perceived level of organizational politics.

The executives classified as tacticians by Kipnis and Schmidt (1988) used rational tactics more than the other tactics, and they were more successful than executives with other tactic profiles (as indicated by performance ratings and salary levels). However, it is not clear what the tactician profile really means. Tacticians were the only people who reported that they used rational persuasion more than any of the other tactics, but an alternative interpretation of this finding is that they have more self-awareness about their influence behavior. Rational persuasion is easier to use than the other tactics for influencing bosses, especially when there is a good relationship (tacticians reported the highest LMX scores). Since other tactics that can be effective for upward influence attempts were not included in the two studies, the tactician profile may tell us less about influence behavior than about the agent's interpersonal skills. Finally, with regard to the ingratiator profile, Farmer and Maslyn (1999) found it was not stable and was the most difficult one to interpret.

The two studies on types of influencers did not adequately evaluate the construct validity and incremental utility for each tactic profile that

was identified. To explore the meaning of the profiles would require research with a broader range of tactics, more accurate measures of influence behavior (e.g., use target ratings in addition to self-ratings), and influence attempts with subordinates and peers as well as bosses. The research should include relevant measures of agent traits, values, and skills that can explain the reason for different tactic profiles. It is essential to verify that the typology can accurately classify most agents, and the researchers should demonstrate that the typology accounts for unique variance in outcomes beyond what could be explained by using individual tactics as predictors.

Power and influence behavior

Research suggests that power and influence behavior are distinct constructs (Hinkin and Schriesheim 1990; Littlepage et al. 1993; Yukl et al. 1996). However, the relationship between specific forms of power, specific influence behaviors, and influence outcomes is not very well understood. Yukl (2006) proposed that power can have different types of effects, and they are not mutually exclusive.

Power can influence the choice of tactics

Some tactics require a particular type of power to be effective, and a leader who has this type of power is more likely to use these tactics. For example, exchange tactics require reward power, which provides an agent with something of value to exchange with the target person. Rational persuasion is more likely to be used when the agent has the knowledge necessary to explain why a request is important and feasible (Yukl and Tracey 1992). The choice of tactics also depends on the relative power of the agent and target. Hard forms of pressure are less likely to be used with a target person who has more position power than the agent (Somech and Drach-Zahvy 2002).

Power can enhance the effectiveness of tactics

Power can be a moderator variable if it enhances or diminishes the effectiveness of proactive influence tactics. This moderator effect is most likely to occur for a type of power directly relevant to the tactics used in an influence attempt. For example, expert power and

information power probably moderate the effect of rational persuasion. Reward power probably moderates the effect of exchange tactics. It is also possible for agent power to enhance the success of an influence tactic for which the power is not directly relevant. For example, an agent with strong referent power may be more successful when using rational persuasion or consultation to gain support for a proposal.

Effects of power when there is no overt influence attempt

It is also likely that agent power can influence the target person's attitudes and behavior even when the agent does not make any overt influence attempt. For example, people are likely to act more deferentially and cooperatively toward someone who has high position power, because they realize the person can affect their career and they do not want to risk the person's displeasure. In another example, people are more likely to imitate the behavior of someone with high referent power (e.g., celebrity entertainer, religious leader), even if the agent did not intend nor desire this outcome.

Influence behavior can affect perceived power

An agent's choice of proactive influence tactics can affect target perception of agent power. For example, an agent's use of rational persuasion in support of a proposed change may result in the target person having a stronger appreciation of the agent's expertise if events verify that the agent's claims and predictions were accurate. Research shows that the proactive tactics can affect the quality of the agent–target relationship (and referent power). For example, tactics such as ingratiation, consultation, and collaboration are likely to improve the relationship, whereas frequent use of pressure and legitimating tactics are likely to undermine it (Yukl and Michel 2006). Target perception of agent power can be affected also by the agent's use of impression management tactics (Ammeter et al. 2002).

Summary and research suggestions

Power is the capacity to influence the attitudes and behavior of other people in the desired direction. Research on the use of different forms of

power suggests that effective leaders rely more on personal power than on position power. The amount of position power necessary for leader effectiveness depends on the nature of the organization, task, and subordinates. A moderate amount of power may be optimal for most situations.

Influence attempts usually involve proactive influence tactics. The four core tactics (rational persuasion, consultation, collaboration, and inspirational appeals) are the ones most likely to result in target commitment. The other seven tactics are more likely to elicit compliance than commitment, but they are often useful for supplementing the core tactics. Any tactic can elicit resistance if it is inappropriate for the influence objective and situation or it is not used in a skillful, ethical way.

Power and influence behavior can be regarded as separate constructs, but they are interrelated in complex ways. Both constructs are necessary to understand interpersonal influence in organizations. Power can affect an agent's choice of proactive tactics, enhance the effects of tactics used by an agent, or influence the target person even when the agent does not make an overt influence attempt. Over time an agent's influence behavior can subsequently affect target perception of the agent's power.

Social scientists have made good progress in learning about power and influence tactics, but more research is needed on the likely interactions among different forms of power, on the effects of combining different influence tactics, on the joint effects of power and influence tactics, and on the conditions that facilitate the effective use of influence tactics. Future research should also include more effort to understand the underlying psychological processes that can explain the effects of power and influence (e.g., Elangovan and Xie 1999; Farmer and Aguinis 2005). Cross-cultural differences in values relevant to power and influence are another promising area of research (e.g., Kennedy et al. 2003). More research is needed on the way people use influence tactics to resist unwanted influence attempts (e.g., Tepper et al. 1998; Yukl et al. 2003). Finally, there is a need for more theory and research to bridge the gaps between the power/influence literature and other subjects that involve influence processes, such as leadership, motivation, job satisfaction and stress, negotiations, conflict resolution, group decisions, organizational change, and organizational governance.

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