Upward Influence Strategies: Relationship with Academics' Career Advancement

[1]*Sakinah Mat Zin*, [2]*Nazlin Emieza Ngah*, [1]*Rusnah Ismail*, [1]*Norlaila Ibrahim*,
[3]*Kamaruzaman Jusoff*, [4]*Asri Salleh and* [5]*Nur Hafizah Ahmad Tajuddin*

[1]Faculty of Business Management
[2]Faculty of Office and Management Technology
[3]Faculty of Forestry, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, 43400 Selangor, Malaysia
[4]Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies
[5]Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
23000 Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

Abstract: Often times, in academia world, academics report to superiors who are not from similar backgrounds and do not share the same standards, points of view or needs. Hence, to be effective, any particular academic staff must understand that upward power is partly based on the ability and willingness to use influence tactics. The aim of this paper is to provide an in-depth analysis of the relationship between upward influence strategies and employees' career success. All three dimensions of upward influence strategies i.e. soft, hard and rational tactics have different effects towards career progression due to the nature of the tactics. The paper argues that career advancement, assuming that all other factors are equal, is a very subjective matter which lies upon three main influencing factors of ingratiation, assertiveness and reasoning.

Key words: Upward Influence Styles · Promotion · Career Advancement, Management

INTRODUCTION

Leadership literature shows many aspects of downward influence from leader to follower. However, Bass highlight that leadership can also be the potential to influence, shape and even direct leader behaviour [1]. According to Chacko, this upward influence can be considered as informal because subordinates exercising it do not have formal authority or hierarchical power over the superior [2]. Studies have rarely examined the effects of influence tactics on perceptions of career progression. In most organizations, evaluations of promotability are based on supervisors' assessments. These ratings are subjective and based on supervisors' perceptions. Thus, they are particularly susceptible to influence attempts. A recent framework in understanding the process by which upward influence tactics affect human resource decisions such as in evaluations of promotability has been proposed by Ferris and Judge [3]. They suggest that an employee's upward influence behaviour affects human resource decisions and actions concerning that

employee. Though it offers a compelling perspective, the concept of upward influence has not received sufficient attention in higher education administration's literatures.

Generally, business managers have clearly structured objectives such as profitability, return on investment, cost reduction, productivity and quality improvements. On the other hand, university staffs work in environments with less clearly outlined objectives and are limited by budgetary constraints and philosophical diversities.

Academics often report to superiors who are not from business backgrounds. Those superiors frequently do not share the same goals, values, points of view or needs. To negotiate for limited resources, an effective staff will, by necessity, have to appreciate the upward influence nature of leadership as it relates to career progression. Just as upward influence is discovered in business organizations, it is also found in higher-education environments. There is potential for university staffs to influence by appreciating the upward influence nature of leadership and employing the upward influence tactics.

Corresponding Author: Norlaila Ibrahim, Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
23000 Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia. E-mail: norla5454@tganu.uitm.edu.my.

Specifically, in order to secure and develop personal and organizational goals, academics attempt to influence their superiors using various tactics. Nevertheless, the option of the upward strategy varies in accordance to the goals. As the world becomes more complicated, challenging and sophisticated, the employee has to be aware about the career advancement strategies. Academic staffs are not advised to merely wait for their career to unfold; the ambitious staff will have to be vigorous and proactive in securing for their career advancement.

The aim of this paper is to provide an in-depth analysis of the relationship between upward influence strategies and employees' career success. All three dimensions of upward influence strategies i.e. soft, hard and rational tactics have different effects towards career progression due to the nature of the tactics.

Career Success: According to researchers, career success can be categorized into extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic are external rewards which are mostly concerned with observable, measurable and verifiable attainments such as pay, promotion and occupational status. The objective of extrinsic career has long been recognized as the hallmarks of career in many different societies [4]. On the other hand, subjective career success refers to intrinsic rewards which are defined by the individual, such as career satisfaction.

Zhao and Zhou indicate that regardless of the position and demographic factors i.e. age, gender, race or others, any employee will look forward for career advancement throughout their career path [5]. Career is a pattern of work experience spanning the course of a person's life and in most situations is usually perceived as a series of stages reflecting the movement of one phase to another [6]. Every employee has the aim for career advancement regardless of his/her position or demographic factors such as age, gender and race. The new entrants may be looking for upward mobility in their chosen career, whereas the seniors will aim at achieving advancement in their career due to their seniority. Hence, in order to achieve career advancement, ingratiation is one of the mechanisms that can be employed by the employees.

Achieving Career Success: According to Dyke and Murphy, the meanings of career success can be categorised into four factors balance, relationships, recognition and material success [7]. Hennequin had established three factors within the career success construct: material career success, psychological career success and social career success [8]. In establishing these constructs of success, academic staffs attempt for proactive effort in having social contacts and relationships with their superiors.

Career success is no more about 'who you know' but rather about 'who knows you' and 'what they know about you'. Earning this recognition begins by showing up, acting as a dedicated, enthusiastic staff and employing ingratiatory behaviors. Personal values provide an important yardstick for evaluating one's career success. It has been found that academics that are proactive, flexible, have expertise in a field and engaged in influence tactics were successful. Besides, flexibility and openness are also required in work environment [9].

Supervisor-focused political influence behaviors e.g. ingratiation and an academic's proximity to organizational decision makers are contributing factors to the enhancement of career success. The engagement in ingratiation tactic shall assist the employee to move up the organization's hierarchy. Ingratiation is likely to enhance career development as mentioned by Orpen [10]. The behaviors such as flattery and agreeing with the boss might improve political favor among a variety of managers.

Upward Influence Strategies: In upward influence situations, there are a number of specific tactics that can be used namely rationality/ reasoning, ingratiation, exchange/bargaining, assertiveness, coalition and upward appeals [11]. Academics might use upward influence in dealing with superiors since it is fundamental to their efficacy and ultimately affect human resource decisions such as in evaluations of promotability.

Farmer *et al*. have identified categories of upward influence tactics. They include hard strategy, soft strategy and rational strategy [12]. Each group has its own tactics and descriptions. Soft strategy is when subordinates secure their supervisors' compliance. It comprises of ingratiation and exchange tactics. Hard strategy is when subordinates use negative reinforcement and punishment to gain compliance from the supervisor and it involves techniques like assertiveness, upward appeal and coalition. Rationality and bargaining are categorized as rational strategies. This is due to the fact that under this strategy, subordinates gain compliance by appealing to the supervisor.

University academics may attempt to influence their superiors in various ways in order to secure personal and organizational goals. However, the adoption of chosen tactics would be in sync with the goals. Research by Judge and Ferris indicate that goals of the individuals, be they personal or organizational, internal or external, determine the choice of tactics for influencing the leader whom ultimately perceives the employees' competence with high rating [13].

Upward Influence Tactics in Human Resource Management: Good or Bad?: Employee satisfaction and effectiveness would emerge from his or her empowerment and involvement activities in upward influence management effectively promoted by the organizations [14]. Researchers have recognized that an upward influence is a useful way to examine the effectiveness of both managers and human resource management processes and systems [3]. They suggest that an employee's upward influence behaviour affects human resource decisions and actions concerning that employee. Their study stresses on the process by which upward influence tactics affect human resource decisions such as evaluations of promotability.

According to Bacharach many organizations' members believe that organizational influence is a crucial factor in many cases, especially if someone has an interest in career advancement and being acknowledged by his employers as a good employee [15]. In order to maintain healthy organizations, Human Resource Managers (HRM) have to understand influence tactics directed upward at superiors since the strategies may potentially introduce a serious bias into HRM functions and damage the selection, evaluation and promotion processes. Ferris and King [16] find that the use of influence in the organization is positively related to the managers' positive attitude toward his/her employees (i.e., the more an employee uses influence in the organization, the more his/her performance is appreciated).

Fedor *et al*. highlight how positive and negative organizational influence represents separate dimensions and may occur at the individual, group or organizational levels [17]. The existence of upward influence cannot be prevented and there will surely be those who will take it for granted. HRM should attempt to define those conditions of upward influence impacts on various human resource phases (selection, staffing, training, promotion, appraisal and so on) is negative, or, alternatively, positive.

Hence, it is important to try to balance the negative and the positive dimensions of upward influence when approaching an analysis of the human resource system in organizations.

Relationship Between Academics' Upward Influence Tactics and Career Success: Most people would engage in upward influence with specific reasons in mind. In order to attain career enhancement, promotable academics who believe in themselves and their abilities would employ upward influence strategies.

Academic staffs ought to exercise expertise in the process of managing his or her superiors if they aspire to succeed in holding a position of major decision-making. According to Siti Rohaida, all three dimensions of upward influence tactics (hard, soft and rational) have different effects towards career advancement [18]. As such, academics have to be selective in identifying as well as applying any of the tactics for the purpose of assessments of promotability. The choice of the tactics is directly proportionate to the goals of the subordinate and its use depends on the relationship between the superior and the subordinate.

Ingratiation is an informal method which takes into account interpersonal attraction, impression management, flattery and creation of good will. It has also been referred to as the influence tactic of favour rendering. The ingratiation-promotability findings in the research of Thacker & Wayne suggest that positive effect of ingratiation influences an individual's career advancement or performance evaluations. Subordinates choose this tactic with the intention of creating a favorable impression [19].

Reasoning is a direct method in which the subordinates use facts, data or logic in their justification to impress the supervisors. According to Villanova and Bernardin, in order to create impressions of competence and promotability, subordinates would present logic and detail information about job-related data concerning their performance to their superior [20]. Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between managers' use of rational persuasion and their effectiveness [21].

According to Fable and Yukl, assertiveness refers to overt or direct tactic. It can be said as 'pressure' tactic [22]. This tactic is normally used by employees with strong internal loci of control, technical expertise and information. There is little empirical evidence that exists concerning the relationship between assertiveness and job-related outcomes. Hence, the use of assertiveness

may create a perception that the user thinks highly of him/her and are viewed as egoistic [3]. Consequently, they would suffer lowered performance ratings and be placed in a less favourable light.

In relation to job-related outcomes, academics should be familiarized with the fact that the majority of the evidence suggests assertiveness to have a negative effect upon perceptions of promotability. On the contrary, ingratiation and reasoning may enhance liking of the superior towards them which is a plus factor for their career advancement.

CONCLUSION

Academic staff must be able to comprehend the dimensions of upward influence tactics as representing hard, soft and rational strategies on career success. This is due to the fact that each strategy has its unique set of predictors. Moreover, successful upward influence suggests smooth functioning and healthy climate of the university with energy for success. Understanding superiors, their expectations, constraints and familiarity with individual variables would aid in the selection and formulation of the tactics for the purpose of career advancement among academics.

The subjectivity of career success, when all other things are equal, lies with influence factors. The superior will promote and award fast track career only to the one he feels more comfortable with and who can be his or her ally. As such, socializing and rubbing shoulders with the superiors or the so-called ingratiatory behaviours may bring about enormous competitive advantage.

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