



POSSIBILITIES AND PROBABILITIES OF USING DIFFERENT POWERS STRATEGIES BY MANAGERS UNDER DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

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ABSTRACT

In her preceding studies the author (Singh-Sengupta 1989a, 1990) found that the managers working in nationalized banking organizations perceived themselves to be powerless whereas the non-managers reported to enjoy surplus power. Such powerlessness was also reported in other public sector organizations (Hassan 1985; Singh 1985). There seemed to be radical departure in the normative distribution of power (Singh-Sengupta 1991) leading to an emerging pattern of power distribution where the managers felt constrained to take work from the subordinates/non-managers and the non-managers/subordinates afforded work shirking, insubordination and defiance, and involvement in non-work activities. In one of the studies the author (Sinha and Singfi-Sengupta 1991) found that it was not the limited authority of the managers which made them feel powerless but the perception of the non-managers which was more crucial. If the managers perceived their non-managers to be work oriented then they felt themselves to be powerful. On the other hand, if the non-managers were perceived to be defiant, not-work oriented, or engaged in meeting their social/personal obligations the managers felt less powerful. The study further highlighted that the adoption of different power strategies seemed to be a function of managers' self-perception of their power in different contexts.

KEYWORDS: *Banking – Motivation- strength power strategies – union commitments- work environment.*

INTRODUCTION

In her preceding studies the author (Singh-Sengupta 1989a, 1990) found that the managers working in nationalized banking organizations perceived themselves to be powerless whereas the non-managers reported to enjoy surplus power. Such powerlessness was also reported in other public sector organizations (Hassan 1985; Singh 1985). There seemed to be radical departure in the normative distribution of power (Singh-Sengupta 1991) leading to an emerging pattern of power distribution where the managers felt constrained to take work from the subordinates/non-managers and the non-managers/subordinates afforded work shirking, insubordination and defiance, and involvement in non-work activities. In one of the studies the author (Sinha and Singfi-Sengupta 1991) found that it was not the limited authority of the managers which made them feel powerless but the perception of the non-managers which was more crucial. If the managers perceived their non-managers to be work oriented then they felt themselves to be powerful. On the other hand, if the non-managers were preceived to be defiant, not-work oriented, or engaged in meeting their social/personal obligations the managers felt less powerful. The study further higlighted that the adoption of different power strategies seemed to be a function of managers' self-perception of their power in different contexts.

THE STUDY

Against this back-drop it was felt that it is the context or the situation which determines the mode or manner in which the influence attempt is to be carried out effectively. Further, this effectiveness depends on some other factors too; for example, (a) the motivation of the actor, (b) strength of the external source of power extraction i.e. trade union, etc. and (c) the supportive work environment where one gets co-operation and positive feedback from seniors and colleagues. It seems thus that the situation provides the setting for the influence processes. Therefore, in the present study the mode of influence attempt was examined against different situations.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the present study was to examine the probabilities of the use of different power strategies by a manager in different situations.

THE DESIGN

The research design of the study was 2X2X2X5 factorial design, where 2X2X2 explained eight different situations and the last digit '5' denoted different modes of influence.

THE SITUATIONS

Setting the Stage for Social Influence

To examine a branch manager's use of power strategies in different situations eight hypothetical situations were framed which comprised of elements from union affiliation, patterns of work behaviour and style of responding.

UNION AFFILIATION**TWO CATEGORIES OF RESPONDENTS WERE PLANNED**

1. Affiliated to union(s), and
2. Not affiliated to union(s)

WORK BEHAVIOUR**TWO FREQUENTLY OBSERVED PATTERNS OF WORK BEHAVIOUR WERE CHOSEN**

1. The non-manager is loitering around and the manager asks him to be at his seat.
2. A non-manager who manages one of the cash counters is absent, and a number of customers are waiting. The branch manager asks some other non-manager to manage it.

STYLE OF RESPONDING**TWO COMMON STYLES OF RESPONDING WERE INCLUDED**

1. Rudely refuses.
2. Politely refuses.

This provided a 2X2X2 framework for the research. Eight combinations of hypothetical situations were framed and presented to the respondents. The situations were: 111, 112, 121, 122, 211, 212, 221, 222. The three digit combinations denoted the sequential placement of the elements comprising the situation.

THE POWER STRATEGIES

A branch manager uses certain strategies to take work from the non-managers. The probability of the use of five different power strategies to influence the non-managers to make them work were examined. The strategies were,

1. Insist to do the work.
2. Assign someone else for the completion of the work
3. Promise to give some benefits in future.
4. Use such words which will make him feel good.
5. Try to persuade to do the work.

THE HYPOTHESES

General Hypothesis: Raven hypothesises that higher the organizational position greater is the use of strong power measures. Contrarily, the general hypothesis in Indian context is that "it is not only the organizational position which decides the use of power strategies but the self-perception of one's powerfulness/powerlessness," that is, the extent to which one is certain or uncertain of its use. Apart from hierarchical positions which grant power and authority to influence others, there seem to exist informal groups, i.e., trade-unions, officers association etc. from which the concerned members extract power and feel powerful.

SPECIFIC HYPOTHESES

Two broad categories of specific hypotheses were formulated to examine the effects of the varying modes of influence attempts adopted by a branch manager in eight different situations. These eight situations are almost similar to what Raven calls "setting the stage for social influence". The purpose is to hypothesize the use of different power strategies to be contingent on situations.

HYPOTHESIS 1. A branch manager is likely to use soft power strategies in the following situations: 111, 112, 121, and 122, Where the non-managers are in a position to extract power and support from trade unions

HYPOTHESIS 2. A somewhat different set of influence attempts (stronger) are expected to be used by the branch manager in the following situations 211, 212, 221, and 222, where the non-managers are not in a position to extract power and support from trade unions.

THE MEASURES

A questionnaire entitled "Managers Behaviours" was prepared which contained following measures:

- 1) The Situations Together with Power Strategies. Eight different hypothetical situations together with five modes of influence attempts were presented to the respondents who were asked to rate the probability of the chances of a branch manager's use of five different strategies against it. An illustration of a sample situation is presented in Appendix I
- 2) Power Related Variables. The researcher was interested in knowing when one feels powerful or powerless. Therefore, instead of restricting the responses within the boundaries of items she kept them open ended and simply asked:

"In some situations, we are likely to feel powerful and in some others, we feel powerless.

- a. When-do you feel powerful?
- b. When do you feel powerless?

Space was provided after each item in which the respondents expressed their views. These statements were content analysed.

Need for power seemed to be closely related to the feeling of powerfulness or powerlessness. Therefore, a single item was used to assess the respondent's intensity of need for power. The item was,

How strong is your need to feel powerful?

- 3) Background information. Some background variables were included to have a better understanding of the respondent's background. The items operationalizing the background information were age, recruitment, length -of service, number of promotions, distance of branch from home town and whether member of officer's association, etc.

THE SETTING AND THE SAMPLE

The branches of different banking organizations functioning in a city of Eastern India provided the setting for research. The total number of respondents which comprised the sample for the study was 80. The average age of the respondents was 40.57 years. Such managers were mostly the promoted ones having about 17 years of work experience (on average). The respondents, on an average, received two promotions each. Such managers were not among those who worked in their native town* the average distance between their native town and work-place was 252.05 kilometers.

The author personally approached each branch. Because of her long association with the banking organizations the branch managers willingly extended their co-operation. Convenience sampling (Sekran 1984) was adopted for the study, meaning thereby, that those who were willing to be interviewed became the respondents of the study.

RESULTS

As mentioned earlier there are three groups of variables:(a) the focal variables consisting of eight different situations with five power strategies as modes of influence attempts, (b) the peripheral variables which consisted of items pertaining to need for power and subjective assessment of when one feels powerful and powerless, and (c) the background variables which were operationalized in terms of respondents' age, nature of recruitment, length of service, etc.

The Focal Variables: Attempt to examine the use of different power strategies in different situations led to the following of results:.

Union Affiliation of the Employees and Manager's Use of Power Strategies : The findings presented in Table 1 show that 'use of words' and 'persuasion' were the most frequently used strategies by the branch managers to influence their non-managers irrespective of their affiliation to the union. "Insist to do work" seemed to be used least for such non-managerial staff who were affiliated to union whereas "promise to give benefit in future" was reported to be used least when the non-manager was not affiliated to union. The interaction was found to be highly significant ($p < .001$).

Union Affiliation, Style of Responding and Patterns of Work Behaviour: These three variables comprised eight different situations. Each had two components. The results presented in Table 2 highlighted that branch managers were found to vary in their use of different modes of influence attempts. The non-manager's informal sources of power extraction, i.e., affiliation to union seems to moderate a manager's choice of power strategies which further influences the non-managers' work behaviour and style of responding. The ANOVA disclosed significant interaction effects among the variables (Interaction effect = 24929.71 ,df = 1/3120; F score = 273.17, p <.001).

Non-managers' Union Affiliation, Patterns of Work Behaviour, and the Manager's Use of Power Strategies: The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that use of good words and persuasion as influence strategies were used most frequently by the managers in all situations. The two patterns of work behaviour, i.e., loitering during working hours and doing additional work of someone else who is absent, seemed to affect the use of different power strategies by the branch manager. Promise to give some benefits in future as a strategy was found to be least effective when the non-managers were found to be loitering around irrespective of the fact that they were affiliated to any union or not. In the situations where the branch manager asks the non-manager to do some additional work of some one else who is absent, the most effective strategies seemed to be use of good words and persuasion. To insist to work seemed to be least effective. Further, use of goods words seemed to be more effective where the non-manager is a member of the union and persuasion where the non-managerial staff is not affiliated to any union. The ANOVA disclosed significant interation effects (Interaction effect = 4510\Z6, df = 4/3120; F - Scores |49.43 p< .001).

Non-Managers' Work Behaviour and Style of Responding and the Managers' Use of Power Strategies: Use of good words and persuasion as strategies were found to be used more frequently by the managers to influence the non-managers in all situations irrespective of their patterns of work behaviour and mode of responding to the manager's words. (Table 4), However, the interaction effect was found to be highly significant as revealed by the analysis of variance.

Non-Managers' Affiliation to Union, Style of Responding, and the Managers' Use of Power Strategies to Influence: Table 5 discloses that irrespective of the non-managerial staff's union affiliation and style of responding (rudely or politely) the branch manager deemed to most commonly use strategies IV and V, that is use of good words and persuasion to influence the non-managerial state. The ANOVA showed significant interaction effect among the variables.

Use of Power Strategies as Contingent on Situations: The mean comparisons of the power strategies across eight situations together with the F- scores are reported in Table 6. A review of the Table indicates that irrespective of the situation the branch managers seemed to prefer "use of words to make one feel good" and "persuasion" as strategies to influence their non-managerial staff. However, if we analyse each strategy across the eight different situations then its frequency of use seems to vary.

STRATEGY- I. To Insist To Do Work : The strategy was preferred most by the branch managers in 211 situation, i.e. the non-manager is not affiliated to union and is found loitering

during working hours. When the branch manager asks him to work he rudely refuses it. The strategy was reported to be least preferred in 122 situation, i.e. the non-manager is a local union leader, the branch manager asks him to do some additional work and the non-manager politely refuses to do so.

STRATEGY - II. To Assign The Work To Someone Else : Table 6 further indicates that whenever the branch manager asked his non-managerial staff to do some additional work then, irrespective of all other things, the branch manager was found to use this strategy. The use seemed to be minimal in 212 situation, i.e., the situation depicting non-managerial staff not affiliated to any union, is found loitering during working hours and when the branch manager puts a check on it he politely refuses to work. The tendency to use this strategy to the maximum was noticed in such situations where the branch manager asked the non-managers to do some additional work because the dealing employee was absent. Irrespective of non-managers' union affiliation and mode of responding the frequency of its use seemed high.

STRATEGY - III. Promise To Give Some Benefits In Future : Table 6 shows that the strategy was preferred by the branch managers most in 222 situation and least in 212 situation. The 222 situation means such situation where the non-manager has no union affiliation and the branch manager asks him to do some additional work as the concerned employee is absent. The non-manager politely refuses to do so. The 212 situation explained a situation in which the non-manager is not affiliated to any union and is found loitering during working hours by the branch manager who asks him to go to his seat and work to which he politely refuses.

STRATEGY - IV. Use of Words To Make Him Feel Good: This strategy was most preferred by the managers to influence their non-managers, as all the mean scores were above 3.60 on a 5-point scale. A cursory look on the table indicates that use of words to make one feel good was preferred most by the branch manager in 112 situation (i.e., the non-manager is affiliated to union, is found loitering during working hours and when the branch manager asks him to be at his seat he politely refuses to do so) and least in 222 situation (i.e., the non-manager does not have any union affiliation. The branch manager asks him to manage, someone else's counter who is absent and customers are waiting. He politely refuses to do so).

STRATEGY-V. Persuasion: Persuasion as a strategy, as highlighted in Table 6, was preferred most by the branch managers in 212 situation (i.e., the non-manager does not have union affiliation, is found loitering during working hours and when the branch manager asks him to be at his seat he politely refuses to do so) and least in 221 situation (i.e., when the non-manager is not affiliated to any union and is asked by the branch manager to manage someone else's counter who is absent, to which he (the non-manager) rudely refuses).

The ANOVA explained high significant interaction effects among the eight situations and use of five strategies by the branch managers *o influence their non-managerial staff to work (Interaction effects 1 5174.84, $df = 4/3120$, $F\text{-score} = 56.70$; $p < .001$).

The Peripheral Variables: This section of variables focussed on the "other-self" power orientation, that is , the source is in the external environment and the effect is the feeling of being powerful/powerless. The responses to the two open ended questions (mentioned earlier) were

content analysed. The factors contributing to one's feeling of being powerful (Question 1) that emerged are presented in Table 7. The responses indicate that realization of one's sense of vigour made one feel powerful. The importance of supportive work environment seemed to be high. The respondents reported that when they helped others they felt powerful. Such feeling of being powerful by helping others was also reported by McClelland (1975).

The content analysis of the second question brought out four factors as contributing to the feeling of powerlessness. These were insecure work environment, lack of altruistic behaviour, lack of positive feedback in terms of appreciation, recognition, realization of self esteem and one's importance etc, and self-accusation. The percentage and ranking of responses for each category are given in Table 8. The responses explain that the extent to which a person feels secure in his power position, his feeling of being powerful gets strengthened. If one feels insecure while discharging one's power and authority then this is likely to produce a sense of powerlessness in him. This is the scene in most of the public sector organizations in India. Lack of altruistic behaviour came up as one of the important factors which seemed to cause powerlessness. The respondents reported that when they missed the positive feedback and autonomy, they felt powerless. Self-accusation, though having the lowest percentage of responses, seemed to be one of the important dimensions of the feeling of powerlessnessTM. This factor has the blend of "self-self" power orientation— that is, the source and the target both is self.

Weed for power. To ascertain the respondent's need for power a single item was used. The obtained findings showed that the respondents had a stronger need to feel powerful as the reported mean scores were 3.64 on a 5-point scale. The co relational analysis showed that older managers seemed to have lesser need for power (although the obtained coefficient of correlations were insignificant)

BACKGROUND VARIABLES: The intercorrelations among a selected set of background variables are displayed in Table 9. The Table shows that the older managers generally had longer length of service and greater number of promotions. Those managers who were directly recruited seemed to have shorter length of service and no union affiliation. However, the older managers were found to have union affiliation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Power is a central concept in any attempt to understand social behaviour and organizations are the media through which the goals and needs of people are achieved. Hence, though organisations show a wide variety of types»and natures, they share certain properties, namely, (a) hierarchy (b) allocation of work, (c) delegation of responsibility and authority. Raven (1988) defines social power as the potential influence of an agent on a target. He considers it a starting point for the studies of power which may involve situations where the target becomes the agent of influence and the agent becomes the target. In such cases, agent's subsequent influence attempts are likely to be modified as a function of the influence on him.

The series of studies conducted by the author and others (Singh-Sengupta 1989; Singh 1985; Sinha 1986) suggest that aberrations are occurring in the normative patterns of power

distribution. The workers or non-managers seem to have greater power than the junior and in some cases even senior managers. As mentioned earlier power is derived not just from hierarchical position but also from membership in trade unions, officers' associations, etc. These groups seem to enjoy parallel power positions in the organisation and function as power counterbalancing groups, the officers' associations are comparatively weaker because of their lesser numerical strength and greater acceptability towards the organisation. Trade unions seem to be stronger and most of the time they function as a parallel power group. The trend is noticed especially in public sector organisations (Singh-Sengupta 1990, 1991). Contrarily, the allocation of power and control in western organisations seemed to be conglomerated with their organisational positions (Raven 1993). The slope of the power curve in the west is likely to be more steep! However "U-shaped" curve is noticed in Indian organisations which explains that even though the manager has formal power and authority he/she cannot use it effectively in practice. He/she is not certain about the effects of his/her influence attempts.

The series of studies conducted by the author further point out that power relationship seems to be contextual. Therefore, the present paper examined the use of five different power strategies in eight different contexts. It was assumed that the informal sources of power, i.e., unions, associations, etc., from where one extracts or derives support and power, seem to strengthen the feeling of being powerful.

Further, the way one responds is very crucial in deciding the style in which one is going to react. Because if one takes something as an attack on one's ego then the strategy adopted for reaction becomes one of ego - satisfying.

The findings show that informal sources of power seem to be crucial in the choice of influence strategies. The managers were reported to use soft power strategies when their non-managers were affiliated to union and mixture of soft and strong power measures when their non-managers were not affiliated to union. Further, supportive work environment, positive feedback, sense of vigour, actualization and capacity to help others were found to make one feel powerful. Insecure work environment, tilted power balance, lack of positive feedback and autonomy and lots of constraints while discharging responsibilities seemed to lead to the feeling of powerlessness. The managers' power further depends on their perception of their non-managers' behaviour. Previous studies too have pointed out that If the managers perceived their non-managers to be work oriented, they felt powerful. If non-managers were perceived to be non-work oriented and their managers still felt powerful, they used corrective power. If the non-managers were perceived to be non-work oriented and defiant and their managers felt powerless, they used soft measures (Singh-Sengupta 1990; Sinha & Singh-Sengupta 1991).

Thus, the very feeling of powerfulness or powerlessness together with the situation decides the adoption of power strategies (strong or soft) by the actor to influence the target person group. The author's earlier studies also found that if the manager felt himself to be powerful he used strong power measures (Singh-Sengupta 1990); if he perceived himself to be moderately powerless he went for soft power strategies (Singh-Sengupta 1989,1991) and if he had reached to such a level of powerlessness where he develops cynicism then his manner of influence attempts became one of withdrawal and he started functioning in a bureaucratic way

(Singh-Sengupta 1989b; Sinha 1990). In general, the findings of the study lend support to the general hypothesis and partially to the specific hypotheses.

To sum up, the following conclusions emerge from the study : (a) The power strategy which seems to be ineffective in one situation may be quite effective in another situation, (b) No one set of power strategies is supposed to be effective in all situations. The effectiveness of the use of different power strategies depends on the managers' power orientation, the perception of their non-managers' behaviour' and the situation in which the power relationship takes place, (c) Strong power measures excel in some situations while soft power measures in others.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE APPROACH

The study helps in understanding the influence attempts in organisations which seem to be contingent on different situations. The findings offer some guidelines to help management to use appropriate power strategies effectively in different situations. The approach further provides scope for changing the behaviour of the non-managers or the target group to fit the requirements of the situation. If not, then perhaps the situation can be changed in such a way that work-oriented styles of behaving in organisations can be promoted which will help to understand the social power not as a zero-sum-commodity but as an expanding-pie-notion leading to collaborative styles of working.

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