Effects of Leader Sex, Subordinate Sex, and Subordinate Performance on the Use of Influence Strategies[1]

Mahfooz A. Ansari[2]
Indian Institute of Technology

The study examined the effects of leader sex, subordinate sex, and subordinate performance on leaders' use of influence strategies. Forty-two male and 42 female engineering undergraduates participated in role-playing situations. Relative to females, males reported a greater likelihood of using such influence strategies as negative sanction, assertiveness, reward, and exchange. In general, subjects tended to employ more of negative sanction and assertiveness and less of reward and exchange when dealing with poorly performing subordinates than with well-performing subordinates. While the subordinate sex had little impact, few interactions were noted. Implications of these findings both for those in leadership roles and for future research are discussed.

Social power as an influence of behavior was traditionally conceived as a dirty secret. But in recent years it has been considered a facilitating factor when an individual strives to influence others in the achievement of organizational goals (McClelland, 1970). It is thus a secret of success (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974) and continues to hold great promise for those who wish to understand the role it plays in social relationships (Mintzberg, 1984). Several

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[2]To whom reprint requests should be addressed at Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur 208 016, India.

reviews (e.g., Podsakoff & Schriesheim, 1985; Yukl, 1981) indicate that, among the various conceptaulizations, it is the "bases of power" scheme developed by French and Raven (1959) that has dominated the field for about three decades. Yet we know little as to how actual influence takes place in organizational settings. Thus, what is more important is to investigate the manner in which a leader influences his or her subordinates instead of focusing all attention on the bases of power for understanding influence (Yukl, 1981). Stated differently, coupled with research on bases of power is the need to examine the actual influence exercised by the leader. Effective functioning of the organization requires that the leader gets the job done amicably and efficiently. However, what influence strategies the leader uses can by no means be taken as universally fixed. Thus, the fundamental aim of the present study is to understand to what extent variation in influence strategies is a function of the individual leader's sex, the sex of the subordinates, and the subordinates' performance.

In recent years, a large number of women managers have carved a niche for themselves in the top echelons of management. This phenomenon alone has made the professional experts in social/organizational psychology busily involved in comparative research on male and female leaders (e.g., see such reviews as those of Dobbins & Platz, 1986; Eagly, 1983; Eagly & Carli, 1981). In most cases, these differences are attributed to sex role stereotypes, in which women are considered less assertive but more nurturant and helpful to others. These stereotypes are seen to be rooted in the socialization process, in which women are taught to be concerned more with the welfare of others than with their own welfare (Epstein, 1980). These learned values and beliefs are believed to extend to their professional career as well, as expressed in their management style and work in general (O'Leary, 1974; Schein, 1973). In this perspective, several attempts have been made to examine the role of leader sex on social influence behavior. But the research findings are mixed. Some researchers (e.g., Kanter, 1977; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980) have failed to find any sex differences in influence behavior. Others who have succeeded are equivocal in their conclusions. For example, a group of studies (e.g., Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Falbo & Peplau, 1980) indicates that indirect manipulative strategies are seen as more typical of women and direct persuasive strategies as more typical of men. More specifically, men are more likely to use such strategies as reward, coercion, legitimacy, information, and expertise, whereas women are more likely to use referent power and to legitimate the power of helplessness (Johnson, 1976, 1978). Recently, Offermann and Schrier (1985) have found that men more than women report the likelihood of using reward/coercion and indirect strategies, whereas women more than men report the likelihood of using personal/dependent and negotiating strategies. Yet other researchers (e.g., Instone, Major, & Bunker, 1983) report that, relative to males, females tend to make fewer influence attempts, use a more limited

range of influence strategies, use fewer rewarding strategies, and use more coercive strategies.

An overall observation of the above body of research seems to suggest that males are more influential than females. It is especially true in the Indian setting where the male position is given higher status than that of the females. In fact, descent is reckoned along the male line. "Whatever the heights of glorification to which the epics and the myths raise [Indian] woman, in actual practice she often enjoys no comfort or status..." (Majumdar & Madan, 1961, p. 68). If sex role is considered a status characteristic, then high-status persons (males) are more likely to be influential and less likely to be influenced (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980). Thus, it is hypothesized that males are more likely to use such direct influence tactics as reward, coercion, and exchange, and females are more likely to use such indirect (soft) tactics like ingratiation.

A second factor that may affect leaders' influence strategies is the sex of the subordinates. Research on this subject also seems inconclusive. For example, some researchers (e.g., Kipnis, 1976; Lyle & Ross, 1973) report that females treat male and female subordinates similarly, whereas males treat male and female subordinates differently. Other researchers (e.g., Mai-Dalton & Sullivan, 1981; Rose, 1978) report that leaders give preferential treatment to subordinates of their own sex. On the basis of these findings, it is hypothesized that leaders would show greater likelihood of using such influence strategies as reward and exchange for subordinates of their own sex than for subordinates of the opposite sex.

A third factor influencing the choice of leaders' influence strategies may be the level of subordinate performance. A review of the literature (e.g., Yukl, 1981) indicates that most of the early studies on leadership were conducted by employing a correlational design with little or no concern for causality. These studies assumed, implicitly or explicitly, that leadership caused the associated differences in subordinate performance (behavior). But recent studies have discovered that the cause–effect relationship can also be the other way around (e.g., Farris & Lim, 1969; Lowin & Craig, 1968; Rosen, 1969). In essence, the subordinate performance or competence is a situational variable that appears to affect the leaders' influence tactics significantly. For example, it has been found that leader behavior varies as a function of the manipulated competence of the subordinates (Lowin & Craig, 1969). In a review of dozens of studies, Sims (1980) observed a great deal of consistency among the reported results, and thus he was forced to conclude that low performance causes superiors to use coercive power. In view of such observations, it is hypothesized that individuals with well-performing subordinates would more likely employ such influence tactics as positive sanction, and those with poorly performing subordinates would more likely employ such tactics as negative sanction.

In summary: (i) a significant main effect of leader sex is predicted, (ii) a significant main effect of subordinate sex is predicted, and (iii) a significant main effect of subordinate performance is predicted. Although interactions might exist, considering the relative paucity of research on this topic, no prediction of such effects is ventured.

METHOD

Subjects

Forty-two male and 42 female undergraduates voluntarily participated in the study. There were primarily engineering majors at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India. They ranged in age from 18 to 21 with an average of 20.35 years. Data were collected during the fall of 1987.

Design and Procedure

The overall design of the study was a 2 (leader sex: male/female) × 2 (subordinate sex: male/female) × 2 (subordinate performance: extremely poor/extremely well) factorial, with repeated measures on the last factor. Each subject was exposed to two scenarios: one dealing with an extremely poorly performing group and another dealing with an extremely well-performing group. The presentation of scenarios was done in random order to eliminate any possible order/sequential effects on subjects' responses. The subject was asked to read a one-page scenario and then to describe the likelihood of taking each action (see Dependent Measures) in response to the circumstances.

Experimental Manipulations

Each scenario had two versions: one in which the subject (supervisor) was assigned to a group of men subordinates, and another in which he or she was assigned to a group of women subordinates. In addition, each scenario varied in respect of subordinate performance: one in which the supervisor was confronted with extremely poorly performing subordinates, and another in which he or she was confronted with extremely well-performing subordinates. The scenario read as follows:

> You are holding a senior supervisory position at the Calicut Glass Company. You
> have worked for many units of this company in the past. Your role as supervisor

has consistently been rated successful. It has been a week before you have been trans-
ferred to a unit which is known to be efficient (inefficient) one. At present there are
10 men (women) working under your supervision. The company record indicates that
this unit has been ranked as one of the five best (worst) performing groups. In most
cases, this efficiency (inefficiency) is because of your high (low) performing subordinates;
that is, your men (women) work (do not work) hard. Now you are adamant to improve
the performance of your men (women) to the extent to which your unit would be
rated the best (one of the best performing group(s)."[3]

Dependent Measures

Based upon the recent work by Falbo (1977), Falbo and Peplau (1980), Offermann and Schrier (1985), and Kipnis et al. (1980), 49 single-statement items were employed to tap the respondents' influence strategies. Subjects were asked to describe, on a 9-point scale (1, *certainly would not do this;* 9, *certainly would do this*), the likelihood of their engaging in the behaviors indicated by the scale items.

A partial test of the construct validity of the scales employed a varimax-rotated factor analysis (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975). Table I reports the factor names and sample items. It can be seen that five factors were generated, explaining a total of 73.5% of the variance. For the most part, the item loaded rather cleanly (i.e., loadings above .30 on the defining component). In order to obtain mean factor scores, item responses were summed up for each subject dividing by the number of items on the factor.

The internal consistency of the scale was assessed with Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and intercorrelations among the scales are presented in Table II. The reliabilities of the five scales were within the acceptable range (Nunnally, 1978). From Table II it can also be inferred that the scales were only moderately intercorrelated (average $r = .15$), indicating a reasonable level of scale independence.

RESULTS

To address whether male and female leaders differed in the use of social influence they attempted to exert with their subordinates, the five influence strategies were subjected to separate 2 (leader sex) × 2 (subordinate sex) × 2 (subordinate performance) analyses of variance (ANOVAs), with

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[3]Built into the stimulus material was a performance manipulation check item. Subjects rated the following question on a 7-point scale (1, *not at all;* 7, *very much*): How much contribution has your work group made to meet organizational objectives? The analysis showed a highly significant main effect of performance ($p < .001$), suggesting that the subordinate performance was perceived as portrayed in the scenario. Other effects, main or interaction, did not reach their significance level.

Table I. Factors with Sample Items[a]

Factor[a]	Sample items	Eigenvalue	% of variance
Assertion and negative sanction	Withhold their future advancements		
(9)	Demand that they do what you want	7.92	28.9
Reward and exchange	Give them satisfactory performance evaluation		
(7)	Offer an exchange of favor	4.88	17.8
Reasons	Tell them the reasons for making the request to them		
(6)	Make them realize that you need their help	3.49	12.7
Expertise and reasons	Show your knowledge of the specific issue		
(7)	Argue your points logically	2.22	8.1
Ingratiation	Use words that make them feel good		
(4)	Show that you always support them	1.64	6.0

[a]Figures in parentheses are number of items.

repeated measures on the last factor. Mean scores on influence strategies are presented in Table III.

Results revealed significant main effects of leader sex for two influence strategies: assertion and negative sanction $[F(1,80) = 11.84, p < .01]$, and reward and exchange $[F(1,80) = 17.06, p < .01]$. Male leaders showed a greater likelihood of using these strategies than did female leaders.

Results indicated rather strong main effects of subordinate performance for assertion and negative sanction $[F(1,80) = 26.54, p < .01]$, and reward and exchange $[F(1,80) = 21.53, p < .01]$ strategies. Subjects showed a tendency to use more of reward and exchange and less of assertion and negative sanction with well-performing subordinates than with poorly performing subordinates.

Table II. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach Alphas, and Pearson Correlations[a]

Strategy	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Assertion and negative sanction	3.24	1.30	.82				
2. Reward and exchange	4.94	1.42	.01	.76			
3. Reasons	5.99	1.53	−.23[c]	.18[b]	.80		
4. Expertise and reasons	6.42	1.34	.11	.25[c]	.38[c]	.79	
5. Ingratiation	6.46	1.53	−.19[c]	.30[c]	.27[c]	.38[c]	.76

[a]Diagonal entries are reliability coefficients.
[b]$p < .05$.
[c]$p < .01$.

Table III. Mean Scores on Influence Strategies

	Influence strategies				
	Assertion and nega- tive sanction	Reward and exchange	Reasons	Expertise and reasons	Ingratia- tion
Male leaders					
Male followers					
Poor performance	3.97	4.82	5.75	6.52	6.80
Well performance	3.11	6.01	5.90	6.54	6.69
Female followers					
Poor performance	4.05	5.03	5.80	6.82	6.13
Well performance	3.11	5.64	5.92	6.60	6.21
Female leaders					
Male followers					
Poor performance	3.29	4.24	5.97	6.33	6.85
Well performance	2.24	4.99	5.90	5.89	6.76
Female followers					
Poor performance	3.48	3.86	6.10	6.15	5.63
Well performance	2.66	4.95	6.61	6.51	6.60
By factor					
Male leaders	3.56	5.38	5.84	6.62	6.46
Female leaders	2.92	4.51	6.15	6.22	6.46
Male followers	3.15	5.01	5.88	6.32	6.78
Female followers	3.33	4.87	6.11	6.52	6.14
Poor performance	3.70	4.49	5.91	6.46	6.35
Well performance	2.78	5.40	6.08	6.39	6.57

The main effect of subordinate sex was significant for a single factor — ingratiation [$F(1,80) = 6.88, p < .01$]. Subjects showed a greater likelihood of using ingratiation with the male subordinates than with female subordinates. This main effect was qualified by a Subordinate Sex × Subordinate Performance interaction [$F(1,80) = 3.97, p < .05$]. Subsequent analyses indicated that subordinate sex made no difference in the use of integration for the well-performing subordinates. But it did make a significant difference for the poorly performing subordinates; that is, a greater likelihood of using ingratiation was shown with the male subordinates than with the female subordinates.

Of interest was a marginally significant three-way interaction — Leader Sex × Subordinate Sex × Subordinate Performance — for the expertise and reasons strategy [$F(1,80) = 6.10, p < .05$]. Post hoc analyses verified that the sex of the leader made no difference in the use of this strategy when the subordinates were either well-performing females or poorly performing males. However, when the subordinates were either poorly performing females or well-performing males, male leaders showed a greater likelihood of using expertise and reason than did female leaders.

DISCUSSION

The present data are based on hypothetical scenarios and highlight what a person reports he or she *would* do, rather than what he or she *does,* in response to a given circumstance. In view of this, the results should be viewed with caution. Future studies, especially field surveys, are needed to test the generalizability of the present findings. Nonetheless, some implications of the findings are obvious considering that the present study does provide experimental findings with high internal validity. In addition, some of the findings are consistent with those of the previous studies.

The results suggest several themes. To begin with, the results concerning the sex of the leader suggest that, relative to females, males are found to be more influential in that they report a greater likelihood of using such influence tactics as assertion, negative sanction, reward, and exchange. The finding that men more than women show a tendency to use direct influence tactics is quite consistent with the prevailing stereotypes of how male and female leaders supervise their subordinates and with that of the previous research (e.g., Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Johnson, 1976, 1978; Offermann & Schrier, 1985). However, the present data fail to substantiate the hypothesis that women more than men employ indirect (manipulative) strategies, although ingratiation as a strategy was included in the present measures. This departure from the hypothesis as well as previous research (Falbo & Peplau, 1980) may indicate that both men and women find the ingratiation strategy equally appropriate for influencing subordinates. At a time when sex roles are changing dramatically and more women are moving into higher status positions, it would be particularly interesting to continue comparative research on Indian male and female managers. Along with research into the influence strategies of men and women, future research should focus attention on the personal characteristics of the leader and those of the subordinates. Two such characteristics, namely need for power and locus of control, represent one obviously important area for additional exploration.

The results suggest, as predicted, that individuals report a greater likelihood of using reward and exchange, and less likelihood of using assertion and negative sanction, for well-performing subordinates than for poorly performing subordinates. This finding supports the earlier attributional research in this area, which has shown that leaders vary their influence styles with respect to subordinate performance or competence (e.g., Farris & Lim, 1969; Lowin & Craig, 1968; Rosen, 1969). More recently, James and White (1983) have also reported that managers showed a tendency to employ more of reward power and less of coercive power for the best performers than for the poorest performers.

The hypothesis relating to the sex of the subordinates receives limited support from the present data. Only in one case was there a significant main

effect, which was qualified by the interaction with subordinate performance. That is, subjects showed a tendency to ingratiate more with poorly performing male subordinates and less with poorly performing female subordinates. Thus, the finding that the subordinate sex makes a difference in the use of influence when dealing with poorly performing subordinates seems supportive of the recent work by Dobbins (1986).

Although not predicted, there was a marginally significant indication in the data that the use of expertise and reason (i.e., a direct strategy) is a function of the interaction among leader sex, subordinate sex, and subordinate performance. Compared to females, males show a sgreater tendency to use this strategy either with poorly performing female subordinates or with well-performing male subordinates. This is not surprising, as there is evidence (i.e., Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; James & White, 1983) to substantiate the claim that leaders develop different relations with different subordinates. Thus, it is of particular interest for future research to investigate how male and female managers develop and maintain relationships with different subordinates, since leader–member relationships have been found to be the most important situational factor in leadership research (Fiedler, 1967).

In summary, the results of the study suggest that the use of influence strategies is affected by both the sex of the leader and the level of the subordinate performance. The sex of the subordinates appears to have little independent effect on the tactics of influence. Yet the data indicate that the use of social influence by male and female leaders appears to change as a function of the sex of the subordinates and their performance. This implies that future leadership research may be more profitable if the subordinate sex is treated as a moderator variable. If this indeed is the natural order of events, then training programs for male and female managers should be designed accordingly. Field research is needed to identify the circumstances in which male and female managers choose to punish, reward, ingratiate, or assert in order to motivate subordinates toward successful performance.

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