

The Effects of Ingratiation on Employee Career Success

LES EFFETS DES FLATTERIES SUR LE SUCCÈS DE CARRIÈRE DES EMPLOYÉS

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Abstract: In an organization, employees have to be especially witty to influence their superiors and gain compliance. Building a better working relationship with their superiors would guarantee lots of perquisites, such as promotion, easier interactions and bigger bonuses. According to scholars and researchers, use of appropriate upward influence strategies contributes to the smooth functioning of the organization and may also affect human resource decisions. Understanding upward influence is crucial because such behavior affects both individual and organizational effectiveness. It was presumed that a superior would allocate more rewards to an ingratiating subordinate. When the superior was potentially opened to influence, subordinates tried to impress him/her by presenting themselves to be strong and competent. Ingratiation tactic is believed to be employed by employees in organizations in order to obtain employers' approval and receive favorable consequences. Enlightened by a plethora of researches on influence, this paper investigates the effects of subordinates' ingratiatory behaviors on their career success.

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Résumé: Dans une organisation, les employés doivent être particulièrement spirituels pour influencer leurs supérieurs et obtenir leur agrément. Construire une meilleure relation de travail avec leurs supérieurs pourraient leur garantir beaucoup d'avantages, tels que la promotion, des interactions plus faciles et des bonus plus importants. Selon les experts et les chercheurs, l'utilisation des stratégies d'influence appropriées contribue au bon fonctionnement de l'organisation et peut également influencer sur les décisions des ressources humaines. Comprendre cette influence est crucial, car un tel comportement affecte à la fois l'efficacité individuelle et l'efficacité organisationnelle. Il est présumé que le supérieur hiérarchique serait allouer davantage de récompenses à un subordonné insinuant. Lorsque le supérieur est potentiellement ouvert aux influences, des subordonnés tentent de l'impressionner en se présentant à être forts et compétents. La tactique de bonnes grâces est censée être utilisée par les employés dans les organisations afin d'obtenir l'approbation de l'employeur et de recevoir des conséquences favorables. Eclairé par une pléthore de recherches sur l'influence, cet article étudie les effets des comportements insinuants des subordonnés sur leur réussite professionnelle.

Mots-clés: flatteries; employés; gestion de l'impression; réussite professionnelle; subordonnés

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the determinants to organizational effectiveness is the ability to influence within the organization. The desired results and resources from the employees' superiors can be secured if the said employees manage to use the influence and power effectively. By gaining influence with the bosses, the employees can build a relationship and create benefits for both parties. Lots of perquisites, such as promotion, easier interactions and bigger bonuses would be gained if better working relationship with the superiors is nurtured. In some cases, the chances for future advancement may be improved by helping the superiors becoming more effective with his or her higher-ups. Leaders normally want a better understanding of how to utilize "human capital" while employees are keen to understand how to better communicate their ideas and accomplish goals. What may come as a surprise, however, is how much the boss's effectiveness relies on the employees.

The effectiveness of human resource management processes and systems can be examined through a political influence perspective in an organization (Ferris & Judge, 1991). The main focus of this perspective is on the influence tactics directed upward at superiors. The success of an influence attempt depends on a variety of issues, like the choice of tactics, organizational attributes and interpersonal relationships. It can be regarded as an attempt made by an employee to sway the superior's manner of thinking to be in line with that employee's intentions. For example, individuals desiring career success may be well advised to use supervisor-focused tactics such as ingratiation, rather than job-focused tactics such as self-promotion. And those interested in their promotability should focus on the upward use of rational tactics rather than using assertiveness as one (Thacker & Wayne, 1995).

Studies have rarely examined the effects of ingratiation on career advancement. 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 was proposed by Ferris and Judge (1991). They suggested that an employee's upward influence behavior affects human resource decisions and actions concerning that employee. Hence, to be effective, any particular employee must understand that upward power is partly based on the ability and willingness to use influence tactics. This article elucidates ingratiation behaviors or idiomatically, employee 'kissing up' attitudes to negotiate for limited resources by appreciating the upward

influence nature of leadership as it relates to career success. As such, he or she would gain favor from the superior by his or her deliberate efforts.

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 Ingratiation

Ingratiation is defined as subordinate improper efforts within organizations to increase their interpersonal attraction in the eyes of their superior. In other words, the subordinate is trying to obtain the superior's approval in order to get favorable consequences such as promotions and raises. The ingratiatory subordinate would exaggerate and highlight only the positive side of the targeted superior so that he or she would be favored. This tactic normally succeeds since it is difficult for people not to like those who think highly of them. Ingratiation is an informal method which takes into account interpersonal attraction, impression management, flattery and creation of good will (Kipnis & Vanderveer, 1971). Subordinates choose this tactic with the intention of creating a favorable impression. A teacher using this strategy has a goal of being liked by the principal. Some common characteristics of ingratiation are saying positive things about others or saying mildly negative things about his/herself, statements of modesty, familiarity, and humor.

Ingratiation has also been referred to as the influence tactic of favor rendering (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988). The agent in this case renders favors with the purpose of ingratiating himself with the target. It has been observed that when subordinates have less power than the managers they are trying to influence, both ingratiation and reason are used (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1982). Ingratiatory behaviors can be considered as the most finely distilled form of organizational politics. Such behaviors are often viewed as part of the darker side of organizational life. A great deal can go wrong when ingratiation is used in organizational settings as a political influence tactic and this is the prevailing wisdom behind it (Kumar and Gladially, 1989). When it is raised in "polite" business company, the term ingratiation itself usually triggers mildly disturbing, frequently negative connotations.

2.2 Career Success

Career is a pattern of work experience spanning the course of a person's life and in most situation is usually perceived as a series of stages reflecting the movement of one phase to another (Carmeli, Shalom & Weisberg, 2007). According to researchers, career success can be categorized into extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic are external rewards, such as an employee's salary or status, whereas, intrinsic rewards are defined by the individual, such as career satisfaction. Both intrinsic and extrinsic variables are important when studying career success (Poole, Langan-Fox, & Omodei, 1993). Zhao and Zhou (2008) highlight that career success is one of the objectives that employees are looking forward throughout their career path.

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. Callanan and Greenhaus (1999) stressed that an objective assessment of an employee's career movement is career advancement. This movement can be seen in different perspectives either intrinsic or extrinsic measures. For instance, certain employees might see career advancement from the perspective of external rewards such as promotion or monetary increment, others would define it as job satisfaction. Regardless of the different dimensions, career success requires a proactive effort from the employees. Hence, in order to achieve career advancement, ingratiation is one of the mechanism that can be employed by the employees.

3. ACHIEVING CAREER SUCCESS

At work, employees want their superiors to like them. Superiors hold the keys to their success, such as raises, promotions, job assignments, recommendations, layoffs, and so on. If we assume that nearly all employees try to be liked by their supervisors, then the difference between the many who try and the few who succeed must lay either in the skill of their efforts, the perceptions of the supervisors, or both.

Getting the management to recognize you for your achievements and consider you for promotions and leadership positions has never been more challenging, especially in large companies. 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 employee and employing ingratiation behaviors. Personal values provide an important yardstick for evaluating one’s career success. It was found that people who were proactive, flexible, had expertise in an area, and engaged in influence tactics were successful. Recently, flexibility and openness was required in work environment (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003).

Supervisor-focused political influence behaviors (e.g. ingratiation) and an employee’s proximity to organizational decision makers are contributing factors to the enhancement of career success. An individual who is not concerned about his immediate boss will be working in isolation and might not experience fast-track careers. By considering the fact that every task is aligned to the higher ups goals which are in turn, the goals of the company, there will be a clear achievement of career success. In addition to that, the engagement in ingratiation tactic shall assist the employee to move up the organization’s hierarchy. Ingratiation was likely to enhance career development as mentioned by Orpen (1996) that these behaviors i.e. flattery and agreeing with the boss might improve political favor among a variety of managers.

4. TYPES OF INGRATIATORY TACTICS

It is often very difficult for principals to differentiate between an honest appraisal and a manipulative ingratiation of an employee. However, there are several means to determine whether an employee’s flattery or complete agreement is fake or genuine.

A superior can judge sincerity by assessing the employee’s frequency of compliment giving, opinion conformity, rendering favor and self-enhancement. Does the worker praise the principal at every given opportunity? Does the worker always support the employer’s notions? Is the employee continually volunteering to perform favors? Does the employee compliment both work and personal aspects of the employer, e.g., car, dress code, speech and other positive traits? According to Varma, Toh, and Pichler, (2006), ingratiation comprises of several strategies namely: self enhancement, other enhancement, opinion conformity, and rendering favors.

1. *Self enhancement* is effected when the subordinate behaves to improve his or her image in the mind of the superior. The idea is to create the relationship with the superior who later may perceive him or her as the perfect employee. The subordinate identifies what kind of employee characteristics desired by the superior and then presents him/her as such preferred person. When it is properly executed, the self-presentation ingratiation tactic should also increase the superior’s affinity toward the influencing agent.

2. *Other enhancement* is the subordinate’s attempt to praise his/her superior’s achievements or qualities. This is the purest form of flattery. Here, the subordinate may exaggerate in his/her admiration, compliments, praises, and generally “batters up the boss.” By making explicit verbal assertions about one’s own virtues, the likelihood that the superior will view influencing subordinates more favorably will be elevated.

3. *Opinion conformity* refers to a subordinate’s ingratiation by agreeing with the superior’s opinions. The subordinate may agree with the superior on nearly everything including work and non-work related issues. This tactic is effective because like most people, superiors are attracted to those who agree with them and such behavior would boost their self-confidence. Here the subordinate acts as a “yes man”. Opinion conformity can be categorized into attitudinal and behavioral conformity. Attitudinal conformity occurs when subordinates express opinions or attitudes that closely conform to that of superior’s presumed sentiments. Behavioral conformity is evident when subordinates attempt to align themselves with the behaviors of superiors through selective agreement, exaggerated regard, or false enthusiasm for the superiors’ actions. Such behaviors are usually motivated by a desire to secure increased liking from the superiors (Byrne, 1971).

4. *Rendering favors* is the ingratiation by doing favors over work-related obligations. Examples of favor doing is when a subordinate offers to take meeting minutes, photocopy materials that the superior needs immediately, and presents gifts upon returning from vacation. The ultimate goal is to gain the superior’s

affection. Favor doing strikes most as a logical means of influence —people generally respond well when someone does something nice for them. This influence tactic involves the subordinate's conveyance of some generous act or special consideration to the superior, under the stipulation that this courtesy is granted out of the subordinate's good will.

The first two tactics are considered as self-focused ingratiation. In contrast, the latter ones are categorized as other-focused.

5. EFFECTS OF INGRATIATORY BEHAVIOURS ON CAREER ENHANCEMENT

Success is actually in one's mind. An employee is a product of his/her own thinking. If she/he has not been able to stretch her/him to the next level of career, there may be mental obstacles in the way. An individual can become a winner in everything he does when he learns how to program his thoughts with a winning, promotable attitude. In order to attain career enhancement, promotable employees who believe in themselves and their abilities, would employ ingratiation as their upward influence strategy.

Most people would engage in upward influence with specific reasons in mind. As mentioned by Yukl & Tracey (1992), influence is normally used for personal or organizational reasons such as securing better work assignments and introducing new work procedures. Furthermore, ingratiationDifferent forms of making others feel good about themselves. also refers to different forms of making others to feel good about oneself or flattery and is likely to enhance career development. Research shows that ingratiation can affect individuals. For instance, résumés that were accompanied with a cover letter containing ingratiating information were rated higher than résumés without this information (Varma, Toh & Pichler, 2006).

Performance assessment in an organization is based on the opinion of a superior and thus, it is opened to manipulation. Ratings, for example, can reflect general impressions rather than specific performance. Subconsciously, the superior may only recall behavior that fits their stereotype of an individual employee. Similarly, research has shown that employee assessments can be influenced by political behaviors that are unrelated to job performance (Thacker & Wayne, 1995).

Employees vary in their ability and willingness to use upward influence tactics to elevate the rating of their performance. Employees can ingratiate themselves with the superior by doing favors, using flattery or aligning their opinion to that of the assessing supervisor for the sake of career development. A supervisor who likes their employee will give them higher ratings. Moreover, some employees tend to promote themselves and their achievements to their supervisor, while others who remain 'quiet achievers' would be unrewarded for their efforts.

Influence which is the essence of managerial work connotes the exercise of power. When existing sources of power are not available, individuals will engage in greater use of influence (Westphal, 1998). Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988 have categorized influence tactics into rational persuasion and ingratiation. Furthermore, Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson (1980) have classified the tactics used to influence superiors into the six categories of assertiveness, bargaining, coalition, friendliness, higher authority, and reasoning.

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 bosses; or the so called implementing ingratiation behaviors may bring about enormous competitive advantage. Pfeffer (1992) proposed that politics and ingratiation are essential to the effective functioning of organizations. He also argued that these perspectives allow more accurate descriptions of how career success is determined.

Thacker & Wayne (1995) stressed that individuals who are proficient at playing politics and ingratiation may attain greater job and career-related rewards. Effective use of political tactics enabled one to achieve career advancement and rewards such as promotions and pay increment (Yukl and Falbe, 1990). Strategic ingratiation influence, implemented at the right time and situation, has proven to be an effective approach to get to the top fast and strike success.

6. CONCLUSION

Besides extrinsic rewards, career success for many people also depends upon the psychological benefits of work, such as the experience of autonomy, companionship, competence, pride, and identity. For the sake of a fast track career, ingratiation is a widespread approach to win a superior's approval solely with one's own self-interest in mind. An employee should consider the consequence of such behavior like losing the respect of his peers and employees. His colleagues would assume that there are discrimination and favoritism in the organization because of his ingratiation behavior.

Moreover, it is crucial for the superiors to understand and recognize ingratiation behaviors so that they may have the capability to treat all employees in their domains of supervision more fairly. This is due to the fact that when double standards and ingratiation exist, rules and expectations become unpredictable; self efficacy employees become afraid to take risks of being creative and spontaneous in their work, comfortable to try new things, and motivated to pursue professional goals. Only when the employees feel that they are being treated equally will they perform at their upmost level and as such produce better results.

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