

TALKING UP: STUDY OF UPWARD INFLUENCE STRATEGIES

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Abstract

In organizations with emphasis on transparency, flexibility, informal talks and open door policies, subordinate-superior relationships and communication patterns are a significant deviation from the norm. This study analyzes transcripts of 23 pieces of interviews for identification of Upward Influence (UI) strategies in a multi-national FMCG company, with aforementioned cultural traits. Extensively discussed strategies like, imitation, reason and logic, and upward appeal, were identified through conversation analysis. Two new strategies, emerged in the course of the analysis, viz. reasoned aggression and nonchalance. The study describes the choice and use of UI strategies in this particular organization. It proceeds to discuss the need for improved understanding of UI strategies in isolation and combination, and in relation to culture, team affiliations, and interpersonal relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

Influence is an attempt made by an agent (individual) to sway the target to a mode/manner of thinking that is in sync with the intentions of the agent. It has been described as "getting one's way" (Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson, 1980). Influence is of two types – downward and upward. The superior's attempt to affect the subordinate is referred to as downward influence; when there is a reversal of the process it is known as upward influence. The focus of this paper is study of upward influence (UI) strategies in a multi-national FMCG organization, through an analysis of talk patterns.

Deluga and Perry (1991) describe UI as an attempt made by the subordinate to secure a desired response from the superior. It is an intentional and strategic choice made by the individual and is directed at someone higher in the organisation, who is more powerful (Waldron, 1999). Considerable amount of work in this area reveals a number of strategies used by employees to attract the attention of and persuade superiors for fructification of either personal or organizational goals.

Literature on UI addresses the following issues:

- a) Motives/intent of influencing agent (Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick and Mayes, 1980, Mowday, 1979; Judge and Ferris, 1993; Wayne and Ferris, 1990; Wayne, Liden, et al.,1997).

b) Choice of a particular strategy (Kipnis et al., 1980; Ansari and Kapoor, 1987; Waldera, 1988; Kipnis and Schmidt, 1988; Kumar and Beyerlein, 1991; Waldron, 1999 etc.) and strategies adopted (Kipnis et al., 1980; Kipnis and Schmidt, 1982; Schilit and Locke, 1982; Falbe and Yukl, 1992; Waldron et al., 1993 etc.)

(The words tactic and strategy would be used synonymously throughout the paper)

Motives for Selection of a Strategy

Managers attempt to influence their superiors in a number of ways in order to secure personal and organizational goals (Madison, Allen, Porter, Remwick and Mayes, 1980; Mowday, 1979 and Schein, 1977). The choice and use of strategies however, varies in accordance with the goals (Kipnis and Schmidt, 1983; Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson, 1980). “Potentially relevant aspects of the influence pattern include differences in choices of tactics to use with subordinates, peers and superiors (directional differences) which tactics are used together in the same influence attempt (tactic combinations) and differences in the choice of tactics for successive influence attempts made with the same target person (sequencing difference)” (Yukl and Falbe, 1992:5).

UI research indicates that the effectiveness of different influence tactics varies and that subordinates use different UI strategies in their attempt to receive desired outcomes such as positive performance ratings, promotions and salary increase (Kipnis et al., 1980).

Subordinates’ choice of influence tactics may affect the result by colouring the superior’s perception of skills or competence, affection for the employees (Judge and Ferris, 1993; Wayne and Ferris, 1990) and/ or perception of similarity between the two (Wayne and Liden, 1995).

Research indicates that the choice of strategy employed by subordinates to influence their supervisors (upward influence) is a result of their motives or goals – be it personal or organizational, internal or external. More specifically, it is analyzing the reasons for choice of one strategy over another.

UI Strategies

Substantial research has been conducted on choice of strategies used for influencing. Kipnis and Schmidt (1982) developed the Profiles of Organizational Influence Scale (POIS) with a 27–item sub scale that measured six tactic categories – rationality/ reason, ingratiation, exchange/bargaining, assertiveness, coalition, and upward appeal. Considerable research has measured the appropriateness of these six upward influence strategies. Other types of research questions have been generated using the original questionnaire employed for measuring these six strategies (Ansari and Kapoor, 1987; Erez and Rim, 1982).

Reason has been understood to be the most “direct” of all strategies (Waldera,1988). The use of this tactic is contingent upon the relationship between the superior and the subordinate and choice is directly proportionate to the goals and needs of the subordinate (Waldera,1988).

Ingratiation is an informal or nonperformance specific exchange (Schilit and Locke, 1982). It takes into account interpersonal attraction, impression management, flattery and creation of good will (Kipnis and Vanderveer, 1971; Kipnis et al., 1980; Mechanic, 1962). Creating a favourable impression could be another reason for the choice of this particular strategy (Leary and Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi and Reiss, 1981). Ingratiation has also been referred to as the influence tactic of favour rendering

(Kipnis and Schmidt, 1988; Kumar and Beyerlein, 1991). The agent in this case renders favours with the purpose of ingratiating himself with the target (Kipnis and Schmidt, 1988; Liden and Mitchell, 1988). 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 and Schmidt, 1983).

Exchange strategy would become operational when there is reward envisaged in the process. Exchange of benefits or favour (Kipnis et al., 1980), exchanging resources or even proposing to make sacrifices is volunteered. Another example of exchange/bargaining tactics could be indebtedness which reminds the receiver of promises for exchange of obligations requiring compliance (Waldron, Hunt and Dsilva, 1993).

Assertiveness tactic is generally referred to as the “hard” tactic in which overt and direct strategies are used for upward influencing. Employees in complete command of the situation, strong internal locus of control, technical expertise and information are more likely to use this strategy. Falbe and Yukl (1992) refer to these strategies as “pressure” tactics.

Working with colleagues and developing support among them would comprise approaches to coalition strategy where more emphasis is laid on numbers, majority opinion and ability to associate with prevailing opinion. In most of his works, Schilit (1987a, 1987b) refers to it as “group support”.

In upward appeal the manager convinces the target of the acceptance of the proposal by higher authorities. This strategy is normally used as a last resort in cases where all other influencing tactics have failed. It is normally understood as a secondary tactic, as the

superior in the initial stages resists all other efforts on the part of the agent (Maslyn et al., 1996; Waldron et al., 1993).

Yukl and Falbe (1990), Yukl and Tracey (1992) replicated the work of Kipnis et al. (1980). They added two more strategies, i.e., inspirational and consultation tactics to the already existing list of six postulated by Kipnis and his colleagues (1980).

Inspirational appeal (Yukl and Falbe, 1990) arouses enthusiasm by appealing to the emotions or values of the recipient. This tactic with similar connotations, has been referred to as the “allurement” tactic by Lamude (1993). This tactic presupposes that the target will eventually benefit by providing happiness to and complying with the wishes of other members within the organization.

Consultation tactics (Yukl and Falbe, 1990) indicate involvement of the recipient in the decision making process so as to secure commitment at a later stage.

Other strategies proposed by scholars are “power” tactics (Cheng, 1983), “volunteer first” (Schriesheim and Tepper, 1989) “troubleshooting” (Waldron et al., 1993). Subordinates also gain influence by closely adhering to organizational rules and norms (Schilit and Locke, 1982) or by “formalization” (Waldron et al. 1993). There have been brief descriptions of other strategies or tactics such as “guilt induction, emotion editing, intentional embarrassment, and elicitation of pity” (Waldron, 1999: 259), Schilit and Locke (1982), and Waldron (1991).

Minor strategies as “avoidance” (Waldron et al., 1983), “withdrawal” (Maslyn et al., 1996), “deceptive and manipulative” tactics (Erez and Rim, 1982; Schilit, 1987a, 1987b; Schilit and Locke, 1982; Schriesheim and Tepper, 1989; Waldron et al., 1993) have also been discussed by scholars.

The foregoing discussion suggests that choice of UI strategies is contingent upon the motive/intent of the sender for achievement of a higher goal, be it organizational or personal. The present work borrows from the existing literature on UI and proposes application of the same to a FMCG company.

In the light of the above discussion this study explores three research questions:

1. What are the factors that impact the choice of UI strategies in a FMCG multinational company?
2. What are the strategies adopted for UI?
3. What are the implications of this study for future research?

METHODOLOGY

Choosing the appropriate strategy for operationalizing the UI attempt is both tough and complex. Multiple influences, local as well as global, can determine the choice and application of a particular strategy for optimum results. Study of internal as well as external, individual as well as organizational factors affecting choice of strategy necessitates qualitative research. Further, researchers need to go deeper into the reasons for application of strategies for UI - to understand the motive/intent of subordinates in choosing a particular strategy. Statistical analysis precludes any possibility of understanding the "commonsense" or intuitive approach to UI strategies. For these reasons, influencing strategies have been studied through conversational analysis of discourse within a multi-national FMCG company.

The company chosen for study is a global player with tremendous presence both in the national as well as international market. Known for its flexibility, transparency, open-

door policy, free-flowing communication and flat structure, the company provided requisite ground for analysis of UI strategies used within the organisation.

Two questions determined the choice of the present company for analysis:

1. Does global culture permeate the organization at the local level? If so, what are the tactics subordinates use for influencing their superiors?
2. Do events, procedures and policies at the company have an impact on the choice of UI strategies? An interesting event, Employee Satisfaction Survey (ESS), conducted by an external agency, once a year at the organization, triggered this question. Employees irrespective of status/hierarchy are asked to fill in a questionnaire regarding their satisfaction with the organization, superiors, subordinates and peers. Some of the typical responses to questions are: "no support from legal"; "too much pressure"; "load variance not informed"; "law of convenience"; "repetitive/monotonous job"; "effort not taken into consideration"; "too much data/clerical work", etc. No hesitancy was evidenced in openly pronouncing statements against policies and superiors. These and similar other "open" responses revealed an open communication culture in the organization. Further to augment this point, a policy that probably stems from the open communication culture followed by the organisation, pronounces "Walk your Talk".

Sample

A purposive sample was selected for this study. The General Manager, Human Resources, provided a representative list of managers. After intense discussion with him I identified 23 interviewees who would be willing respondents and would provide open

responses to queries. Minimum time spent in the organization was three years. At the preliminary round I decided to restrict the study to the western zone - in and around Gujarat. To make the data truly representative of the company, at least of the western zone, I selected managers at 4 different levels from Ahmedabad, Naroda, Bhuj, Rajkot, Bharuch, Vapi, Surat and Jamnagar. To avoid any bias that might arise due to departmental affiliations or politics managers from different departments, viz. finance, general management, human resources, logistics, manufacturing, sales and distribution were interviewed. Given the existing standing and culture of the company, the interviews focused on the choice and use of UI strategies. I attempted to study the prevalence of the six strategies proposed by Kipnis (1980) viz., rationality/reason, assertiveness, bargaining/exchange, upward appeal, ingratiation, and coalition through interviews with managers in the company.

The following framework for UI was conceptualized:

Insert Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework for a study of UI strategies in a FMCG Organization

The above framework provides ease of analysis but it requires careful examination of validity of data and possible bias of researcher through collection and interpretation of data through multiple sources.

Procedure

I used an interview schedule because a detailed survey instrument would have interfered with the inquiry. The list of questions elicited responses with overt and covert implications on choice of UI strategies within the company. The schedule presented the

concept of strategies in relation to organizational culture and subordinate-superior relationships as a series of topics in a simple 3 part outline. The first part was organization specific –familiarity with the culture, adherence to norms, likes and dislikes were queried. Second part dealt with subordinate-superior relationship. Part three probed into reasons for manager’s choice of strategy for persuading/influencing the superior. The interviews were tape recorded and lasted about 45 minutes.

This study used an interdisciplinary approach adopted from the ethnographic traditions of mass communication. Hence the coding patterns emerged from the words used by the interviewees. The procedure used was that provided by Fielding and Fielding (1986) who stated that the frequency and themes offered by the participants be used for analysis. As suggested by Walzer and Gross (1994) I chose to use the participants’ own words, often grammatically incorrect, for descriptions and statements.

I assigned each interview a sequence number as a means of protecting their identity. The interview numbers remained to the very end for coding and record keeping. All interviews were transcribed and identifications of the speakers were removed from the transcripts. Two separate readers coded each transcript. I compared the coding and determined the ultimate classification of each type of item.

Data interpretation was validated through a presentation to some members of the organization. Analysis was further shared with faculty colleagues for their comments and insights in the interpretations presented in the paper. The statements of all the interviewees were cross-validated. Some managers were even interviewed twice for authenticating the data.

ANALYSIS

To study application of UI strategies 23 transcripts were analyzed. Examples provided in the text represent a sample of these instances. In a few instances, the transcripts did not contain examples of overt usage of strategy. For these cases, evidence with covert statements is used. This was not thought to be problematic as the

1. study was exploratory and not definitive in nature and
2. examples provided seemed to represent common, not idiosyncratic, experience

The company is a multinational FMCG with a strong presence in 100 countries. Job profile involves a lot of traveling and interacting with internal and external customers round the globe. Does the macro (global) and micro (local) influence impact the thinking and behavioural patterns of the employees? To analyze the first part of the question a few queries can be raised: What is the influence of global culture on the functioning of the company? Does it permeate to all levels? Do the employees merely project or are actually involved in operationalizing larger cultural dimensions (as open policies etc) for the growth of the organization? Some frequently reiterated aspects of global culture found within the organization and used by interviewees are as follows: transparency, flexibility, flat structure, and open door policy. What is the impact of these factors on the UI strategies adopted for convincing the superior? Answers to all these queries were structured in the responses provided by the interviewees.

Research Question 1: What are the factors that impact the choice of UI strategies in a FMCG multinational company?

Interviewees shared a view that the strong global influence within the organization shaped the culture and their behavioural patterns. Within that framework, the participants defined global culture as being “transparent, flexible, with a flat structure and open door

policy”. From the participants’ comments I structured a typology of attributes that could be associated with global influence. I explored how the interviewees understood global culture, the connotations associated with it, and the impact of the same on their influencing patterns.

Transparency: Transparency in terms of environment, definition of roles and job profiles has been recounted by the interviewees. There is nothing hidden in terms of policies, roles or attitude to work or relationships, be it with superiors or subordinates. Participants assign a logic/ reason in observing a transparent system within the organization. “I think 90 per cent of the problems can be sorted out the moment you are honest, transparent, discuss along that topic. Either you get convinced or you convince the other guy.”

However, not all responses are consistent in this particular case. 5 participants stated that transparency in systems is only skin-deep. It does not flow to all levels within the organization. For instance, we get to know through a response by an employee that: “Like ... in case, in case the superior, higher authority or higher manager, in the structure of the organization is not competent enough ... there is no solution for that particular guy. If a person of a lower cadre is not performing well, okay, he’ll get firing very soon. His promotions will be blocked. Such things are not done for people who are at the top ... Above certain level ...” Further, while these same 5 managers were generous in their responses they were not very happy and quite vocal on certain issues. “[...] at times it so happens that different rules are applied to different people depending on ... on the kind of person he is.” The top team players were even accredited with avoiding embarrassing or threatening issues - instead of being transparent, they resort to avoidance. The size of the

organization precludes possibility of there being complete transparency, on all occasions within the company. As counter argument 18 respondents agreed that “[...] because of the size sometimes it becomes very difficult although the intention of the organization is very good, it happens so that you feel that communication has not happened to you or your people ...wherever they are”. All the participants stressed the importance and benefits of transparency in shaping the behavioural patterns of managers.

Flexibility. Respondents were divided in their opinion on flexibility in the organization. Their understanding of the term ranged from flexibility in manner of meeting deadlines, achieving goals, adhering to policies, dealing with personal issues: like working with flexi-time, taking leave, and presenting new ideas.

Participants were happy with the amount of flexibility that exists within the organization in terms of policies, relationships as well as acceptance of ideas. 22 were in agreement that the superiors were flexible enough to accept ideas from subordinates if they were convinced with the presentation of logic in the arguments – “ That is why what I said about system being flexible and, ... you can argue it out.” As superiors to other members of the organization, interviewees proclaimed their openness to ideas, concepts and change. In this company “if you are not able to achieve your numbers, ok, the top bosses will understand that there are certain limitations, there’s possibly something wrong in the market, and that’s why you are not forced beyond a limit.”

20 interviewees stated that despite immense freedom given to them in terms of designing the input, strict adherence to time was also imposed. "Suddenly they give us this period ...you have to complete this work. They give the freedom. Whatever you want to do, do it. Deliver the result. Like that. For example, I’ll give, suppose you have to put up a paper

of your plan, okay? They give a certain time – in two months you have to finish. Whatever you do, you do, you have the freedom. We want the results."

All the respondents were despondent about lack of flexibility in meeting personal goals or understanding or handling personal issues. Superiors would make no compromises when it came to achieving organizational goals. There is "no balance between personal life and work". 7 interviewees were of the opinion that if the reason is genuine or sound, superiors can be convinced to give leave. The ground should be firm, and logic convincing to get the desired results –"leave is never turned down, even if there is a critical situation. In a genuine case of taking leave, they never asked us to stay or compelled us to finish, never denied. Basically the system is not dependent on anyone. The system is working."

Open-door policy. Interviewees stated that the open-door policy within the company also determined their choice of UI strategies. There were no restrictions were imposed on approaching superiors for presentation of viewpoints. 19 agreed to the fact that their suggestions were considered at the time of formulating policies by the higher authorities. "It's pretty open kind of an organization. Open as in... the top bosses are actually receptive to what you are saying. That way you are actually free to express your ... opinion, feeling about any particular issue."

4 interviewees were skeptical of the existence of an open door policy. They felt that their ideas were not considered by the superiors. However, they were flexible enough to accept the fact that this problem could have arisen as a result of a mismatch between the expectations and priorities of the superior and the subordinate. A reason attributed by the interviewees to the open-door policy was the flat structure within the organization.

Though they stated that no hierarchies were observed, there is evidence in their statements that superiors did gain compliance from their subordinates by virtue of their position in the company. “Okay being a subordinate if he [superior] puts through some things down my throat, that no this thing has to happen, probably because I am supposed to be doing a job I might do, but I might not be convinced to do that.”

Based on open communication patterns the relationship between the superiors and the subordinates is informal and there is also an informal sharing of knowledge/information. Exchanges at an informal level are preferred to formal meetings or email. Some representative responses to the interviewer's question of approaching the superior for influencing/chatting or discussing are: "informal talks are better", "informal talks and meetings", "informal talks followed by letters, memos", "verbal, I mean, informal talk".

Informal talks, as recounted by interviewees, are the best way to communicate, build rapport and influence. Building rapport by direct sharing of ideas enhances the communication process. Influencing as a process is, in the initial stage, initiated by direct talk and subsequently followed by letters and memos, if the need arises. In a discussion on the process of influencing, an employee informs the interviewer of his own process of influencing and states that it “begins usually with informal talk. Then you start talking about an idea that you have in mind, which is followed up with an e-mail, which then concretizes the whole thing, then you put a proposal in concrete and you refer to the discussion that you had earlier, then you put that up and on that basis, what ever happens.”

More important is the relationship building aspect by making small talk before building on larger issues pertaining to the organization.

“Informal way ... you know normally we meet outside, then we talk it out ... first, we talk, talk out those things which are of his interest and then slowly and gradually we begin talking about the organization, about the plant, about the plant operation and lastly about the people. What kind of people we have, you know, surrounding us and all that. Even we talk about internal environment as well as external environment. Like, we do talk about political issues and, you know, police administration, collector office and how do they influence our business, you know, even *goondas* [thugs] also at times.”

There is confidence in the participants that when they propose or raise an issue, the superior would listen to them. For example, one employee states, “Whenever I go to discuss an issue, they listen.” 19 agreed that suggestions provided by them were taken cognizance of and superiors were willing to go by the statements and persuasions of the subordinates. Listening by superiors was "100%" if presentations had reason and logic. In this "firm and fair" organization employees were divided in their opinion on action taken after presentation and analysis of viewpoint. 6 categorized it as an issue of priorities – “superiors with different priorities [might] consider the presentation unsuitable in the current situation.”

Two participants, who had been working in the organization for the last five years, did bemoan the loss of total informality in dealing with superiors. They felt that with different levels being introduced, communication in the company had become slightly formal, which was not the case a few years ago. However, the best part of this

"happening change" was that "you can still communicate informally with your boss". As one manager recalls, "You know, one of the directors called me up from Delhi and I could, kind of, you know, tell him that, you know, I'll give you a call in five minute, I'm in a meeting, you know. That's what this organization means. Otherwise, you know, look at a scenario like any typical Indian company or a government company, one will stand above the seat to really speak to the ..."

The thinking process of the employees is partly moulded by the relationship they enjoy with the superiors and partly influenced by the organizational culture. Reflection of it is seen in the behavioural aspects and the talk patterns of the employees. "Generally see, admin. issues like whether it is arrangement of transport, or whether, you know, cost saving initiatives. On those points, suppose I differ with them [subordinates] or they differ with my decision, they do come to me, tell upfront that boss, whatever you are thinking is wrong, we are damned sure that if we do this we will deliver this." According to the participants all influencing is team-oriented. When the goal is organizational or team related, any or all combinations of UI strategies are adopted to secure a desired output.

17 interviewees stated that their relationships with superiors were informal, which accounted for aggression, arguments and confrontations. However, 6 were skeptical and stated that they did try to seek information about leader's expectations as "it will elevate our position in the company, I think every individual does, those who don't ...those people lie." Their statements indicate that they try to informally gain information about the superior's expectations prior to vocalizing their intent.

All employees agreed that the talk patterns observed in the organization are informal. There is more of direct sharing. Informal channels like face-to-face interaction rather than emails or letters were preferred. 5 stated that more important than meetings or informal talk was the telephonic conversation that "connected immediately". Meetings, another form of interaction, are preferred to written, formal communication. Interviewees tried to neatly categorize the choice and use of informal channels for communication – an informal chat was preferred when there was involvement of two people and meetings when the number was over two. When queried on the reasons for the probable selection of mode for communication all agreed to the fact that it helped them in rapport building as they got to know the thought process of the recipient. Interviewees agreed that persuasion within the organization takes place through informal talk. Subordinates do not necessarily have to take recourse to formally convincing the superiors. The response of all the participants indicated that convincing and persuasion was done informally. 10 respondents stated that through informal talks they could keep the “boss in the loop” hence, when the need arose to persuade him, it was an easy process as issues had been informally discussed at an earlier stage. Even as superiors they encouraged their subordinates to conform to open communication patterns in which views are shared and proper action is taken. “ [...] Generally see, admin issues like whether it is arrangement of transport, or whether, you know, cost saving initiatives. On those points, suppose I differ with them[subordinates] or they differ with my decision, they do come to me, tell upfront that boss, whatever you are thinking is wrong, we are damned sure that if we do this we will deliver this.” Politeness is not strictly adhered to as the focus of the company seems to revolve around team performance for maximum results. Talking informally,

over the telephone is also preferred to formal meetings. Participants felt that building rapport and improving relationships through informal talk, and open communication channels enhances influencing abilities.

As a result of discussion with the interviewees on the factors that impact the choice of UI strategies three points emerged:

1. Open door policy encourages informal talk
2. Informal talks are preferred for influencing
3. UI can be done by using strategies informally.

Research Question 2: What are the strategies adopted for UI?

UI Strategies Adopted

Given a particular environment, what are the UI strategies employed within an organization for successful persuasion? On the basis of the responses of the participants, a typology of strategies emerged. I studied the participants' understanding of UI strategies, then looked at the sample for patterns and combinations, if any, for influencing the superior.

Reason and Logic. Being reasoned in presentation of arguments, and discussions was unanimously agreed to be the best UI strategy. All participants cited instances to this extent. All interviewees found superiors were to be more tolerant and attentive in listening if the approach was reasoned and logically sound. 16 respondents were of the view that appropriate use of reason would help them in UI. The either-or situation is accepted provided it is backed with reason. They are of the view that major disagreements and arguments can also be sorted out if they are logically discussed. "Yeah, these four-five things in the past have not happened properly, and this is the

reason that I need to intervene more than what I used to do earlier. I think this is the way ... best part is you need to communicate. Whether it is with your peer group, whether with your subordinate group or whether it is your boss group." Employees have developed traits of being open and reasoned in presentation of viewpoints. This, they feel, helps in convincing and influencing.

"There has to be a reason"; "They [superiors] will listen when there is logic"; "Explain it logically" are just some examples from the transcript that prove the overriding concern for reason and logic within the organization. All participants agreed that superiors are trained enough to understand the situation hence if the subordinates can provide reason and logic the process can be galvanized. "End of the day, unless things are rational and logically presented, I don't think anyone is going to accept." It is not only a case of persuading the superior but also convincing other members. Describing a situation one interviewee recounts,

"[...] was very new to the setup; hardly joined organization. I spent about three ... three months or so. But I could immediately figure that out, that this was wrong. So, in one of the review meetings I voiced it out, and it did not happen. So next time when the review meeting took place ... this time I went with preparation. I told them, look this is variable cost and how it is variable cost ? I had all other data and, you know, ancillary information with me. And, I proved that point that yes, this is a variable cost and it, it ... in fact, it went into altercation kind of thing. You know, the person was showing, you know, blood rushing in his veins and that kind

of a thing. But then, I stuck to the point I had in mind and ultimately I emerged as victorious. Because then I asked him certain questions as to what is the definition of fixed cost, what is the definition of variable cost ... there is variable cost attached in fixed cost, what is that ... and what is fixed in variable cost, you know. He could only explain those terminologies. And ... person could not explain. so, ultimately it so happened that he had to get convinced. and, it so happened that it was in a meeting with all the HODs. So, though it was heated argument, but ultimately I could prove my point. You know, without compromising on the, the definition part, you know, I did not play with the definition.”

All participants cited similar instances. While they agreed that reason was the most important strategy, they stated that the technique of using it would vary with a change in team or HOD. The basic premise from which logic stems is that “a story needs to be sold”. To whom, how and when are prioritized and the “story” is then suitably “sold”.

Aggression. All participants stressed upon “aggression” as a way of functioning. All responses were punctuated with use of “aggression” or “aggressive behaviour”. Their responses indicate that they understood aggression as a behavioural pattern in which they need to take a stand, push their way forward, force their views and convince the other.

Participants stated that maximum amount of aggression is witnessed at the time of “seasonality” (The months in a year when the demand for the product is maximum).

Elaborating further an interviewee recalls that an accepted fact in the organization is that the right judge for decisions to be taken at this time is the employee “on the spot”. He has

his constraints in terms of employees working with him and resources. Deadlines need to be met, and targets achieved. In this situation if the superior is not willing to listen (could be his unfamiliarity with the situation) and time is limited, subordinates do not waste time in going into finer details. They “tell” the superior of their moves and proceed in the manner they deem fit. As one interviewee sums it up “because our presence is in a do or die situation.”

14 interviewees “aggressively” stated that if their perception does not match with that of the superior, they would argue their point and if still unable to convince would refer the case to “boss’s boss”. Dissent, whether with superior or subordinate, it was majorly felt, needed aggression. “You cannot do conflict management by postponing it or by avoiding it.”

Aggression also emerges as a response to the tough times and the need to perform to the best of one's ability if one In fact, viewing the superiors behave in an aggressive way and accomplish tasks, many employees within the organization feel that it is a virtue. “[...] aggressiveness is great, ... I take it as a challenge, if the superior is that much aggressive, I need to be too [with the superior].”

All participants stated that they had started enjoying the aggression and when queried on things they like best about the organization, 21 responded that they liked their own aggressive behaviour and “aggression in the market” as it helped them to face challenges and meet competition. Citing an incident one interviewee recalls, “... in one of the meetings which we were having, there we were working on small group activities (SGAs). So, in one of the SGAs in which I was present, that was SGA for CEO to unit group, okay? So, I had some point, which my branch manager was not agreeing to. So

there we had a loud discussion at that time. And I felt so bad that I left the meeting and went out; banged the door and went out. So ... it happens sometimes, not always.”

According to the data it is a necessary trait that employees need to develop if they have to “stay in tune with the requirements of the company. May be, because our presence is in do or die situations. Some times situation gets inflamed so at that time people become aggressive, I know as I am also in the same trade and have been going through this for many years now.”

21 participants recounted that they enjoyed the aggressive display of attitude in the organization, reveled in arguments and confrontations. Extolling the virtues of aggressive behaviour 1 interviewee extended the discussion by insisting that aggression was “part of human nature”. However, 3 members were mellow and stated that only in situations when they were pushed in a corner and could see no way out they “sternly” and aggressively pushed their way forward. They stated that “vocally” they never became aggressive, with seniors they were never aggressive but in certain situations they were forced to take on an aggressive stance.

The subordinate-superior relationship is informal, and based more on team-camaraderie than hierarchical bindings. Because there is immense pressure to deliver, need for cooperation in individual teams is higher with greater potential for confrontations and resolutions in the interest of the team. Hence, superiors are also open to the convincing strategies used by subordinates as individual performance is measured in terms of team performance. Assertiveness, as a strategy, for conviction can then give way to aggression, but one that is reasoned. Excessively smooth functioning of the team may signal apathy. Managers are thus rationally motivated to draw out the best from their subordinates. This

can only happen if their choice of strategy for gaining compliance is mirrored by the subordinates' adoption of similar tactic for convincing/influencing or persuading.

Reasoned Aggression: "Reasoned aggression" as a persuasive strategy has been defined by the participants as a tactic in which convincing takes place by making forceful expressions or statements, pushing forward of ideas relentlessly, unmindful of the convictions of the other party. Employees using this strategy are "generally aggressive" (Devito, 1995: 164) people. They take over in almost all situations. They think little of the values, the beliefs and opinions of other people but are sensitive about criticism of themselves. As a result they frequently get into arguments with other people. However, in this study data revealed that there was a clubbing together of reason/logic and aggression. From the findings it emerges that usage of either reason or aggression independently does not produce the desired results. They need to be conjoined for optimum results in persuasion. 21 interviewees claimed that it was only with aggression that they could get an active audience - however, the clause attached to this statement stated "reason/logic has to be built into the argument." The use of this tactic came out more openly when dealing with personal issues. All interviewees felt that they could use reasoned aggression in issues pertaining to "leave taking", when work pressure was high and deadlines had to be met. The manager's "sincerity and integrity" was recognized and it took but little time for the superior to thaw and relent to the strategy adopted by the subordinate. 5 participants were hesitant in using this tactic but the rest "aggressively" countered all arguments and stated that reasoned aggression with the boss worked and in 80% of the instances they were successful.

Upward Appeal. Participants stated that open door policy, amicable subordinate - superior relationship and informal talks have created a culture in which upward appeal as an effective UI strategy is used. 20 agreed that the “boss’s boss” could be approached if immediate superior was not willing to listen to the arguments of the subordinate. 15 attributed this to a flat structure within the organization and stated that it was not a “hierarchy bound organization”. As indicated earlier, not all agreed to this fact. However all 20 felt that “boss’s boss” could be influenced by reasoned arguments or presentations. “Suppose in case, policy guidelines. If my boss is not agreeing, I have to overlook my boss, I have to ask permission from his higher authority also.”

The remaining 3 also agreed that not all problems, issues were necessarily handled at the immediate level. Cases have been witnessed in which employees go to any level in the organizational structure in issues pertaining to employee satisfaction. What all agreed to was the need of “reason for bypassing”. Recollecting an incident, an interviewee sums up the need and process of upward appeal, “after presenting my viewpoint and listening to the viewpoint of the superior, I am still not convinced, I need to present additional data, more logic and reason. Failure on both counts can be then used as a reason for upward appeal for boss is in his place, I’m in my place.” All interviewees were of the view that while an open door policy is followed, employees have to be careful with the arguments that they use for upward appeal. Reasons have to be given and risk factors spelt out for persuading the superior to own point of view. “I need to be *pucca* [absolutely sure] about my data, logic, why I am doing this [...]” They were of the view that Inaccuracy in the presentation of data or facts would not be tolerated.

Imitation: 17 interviewees were of the opinion that imitation of the strategies employed by the superiors would be more effective in persuasion than choice of any other. As one employee states, “If my senior is arrogant, then probably that attitude will trickle down to me as well. If he is arrogant, I’ll also get arrogant.” How much of it is “trickle down” and how much is imitation is proved by employees stating their belief in and practice of “Do as I do” or “Do as I show” and not “Do as I say” or “Do as I reward”. Recounting their interaction with and training imparted to freshers all interviewees stated that they worked with them practically and “whoever comes I will do and show them. That is how they learn. No dialogue, but I can make them understand while doing work. They will learn more.” They categorically agreed that freshly inducted employees learnt by watching their superiors. All stated that there was no formal induction to the culture and values of the organization. “Nobody formally introduced me to it. I have watched and I have seen, nobody taught me. By watching we will be able to learn.”

Nonchalance: “Nonchalance” is a UI strategy in which the agent makes an attempt to sway the target by indicating lack of interest or involvement in the subject under discussion. However, it is not the truth but a mere projection of an attitude at the time of influencing. “Take it or leave it” strategy normally follows the reasoned aggression tactic. Once again adoption of this strategy could be a result of time pressure. As one interviewee explained, "Completion of various tasks in teams requires coordination at different levels. If the boss is not willing to listen or get convinced by reason, aggression or a combination of the two, I move on to a very effective way of convincing him. ... Show total lack of interest in the issue ... show disinterest in the team

proceedings ... he[superior] then asks me the reason for it and in an informal chat I tell him." 16 interviewees recounted use of this tactic to persuade the superior. However, very pointedly they stated that display of lack of interest or involvement is only at the superficial level – it is actually projection of an attitude that does not really exist. I refer to it as a “projection” for the interviewees at different stages in the interview did reveal their concern with the superiors’ expectations and their desire to work towards accomplishment of the same. 20 interviewees stressed that they were spontaneous in giving their responses. Out of these 20, only 6 were of the view that if they were unable to convince the superior by the "spontaneous integrity" of their responses, they wouldn't bother themselves too much with it. As 1 interviewee out of these 6 stated, "[...] whatever the idea I believe is right, I'll stick to my decision." Similar statements were made by other participants.

Research Question 3: What are the implications of this research for future study?

Insert Fig.2 Influences and Influencing Strategies

1. Direct and positive relationship between organizational culture and team affiliations impacts UI strategies. As revealed through the study UI strategies are impacted by the macro (organizational) and micro (team) culture. Of the 23 interviewees, all spoke of the global influence on the organizational culture that impacted their choice of UI strategy. My study would seem to indicate that culture and training play an important role in shaping the influence processes. However, team affiliations also prevail in the communication settings of the interviewees. Researchers would need to study the link

between the two. This study indicates that the UI strategies adopted are a result of external as well as internal factors. These factors seem to reflect more directly on processes and behaviours linking influencing patterns in a typical environment. As suggested by Kohn and Schooler (1982), there might be processes within the organizational units that encourage workers to have similar traits. It could indicate that choice of a UI strategy is unit-specific. Behavioural (dis)similarity, and hence (dis)similarity in approach could impact team processes, either positively or negatively. The influencing process would be contingent upon the entry or exit of team members within the organization. Researchers could do more compelling analysis by studying the UI strategies across teams and over a period of time to test stability in terms of usage of a viable communication strategy for persuasion. Studies are needed of the full dimension on UI, cultural dimensions and team affiliations within the organization so as to be able to spell out an appropriate strategy for a typical culture with its orientation towards task accomplishment under excessive pressure. There is a major difference between solitary studies of cultural dimensions (macro) of the organization and team affiliations (micro) in relation to UI. What is significant in the macro setting may not be true in the micro. Researchers need to understand how to shift focus between the two and arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of UI in a specific type of organization.

A study examining other dimensions within the organization, apart from culture and subordinate superior relationship, might facilitate a complete understanding of strategies and reasons for choice of a particular strategy. The study suggested that organizational culture and subordinate-superior relationship would exhibit stronger effects on choice of UI strategy, but its relationship to decision making was not analyzed. Within a larger

population of organizations, explicit or implicit intent of employees while persuading or being persuaded may be more diverse and thus the potential for analytical generalizations may be greater.

2. High interpersonal relationships encourage reasoned aggression. All 23 participants spoke of good interpersonal relationships with their superiors primarily a result of the preponderance of informal talks, team affiliations and open communication channels. Greater proximity and subsequent imitation of behavioural traits emerge as part of the findings. While reason has been recognized as the most basic, yet powerful strategy for UI, combination with aggression, in this study, provides ground for future research. Data would seem to indicate interpersonal relationships as a major factor in deciding on UI strategy, viz., reasoned aggression. However, healthy interpersonal relationships could also be a precursor to choice of other UI strategies. Researchers would benefit by studying linkages between culture, relationships and UI strategies (in specific, reasoned aggression) in FMCG as well as non-FMCG organizations

3. Nonchalance is preceded by reasoned aggression. The findings reveal that nonchalance always follows reasoned aggression. As discussed earlier it is projected and not real. Disinterest in the discussion or the argument subsequent to unfavourable response from the superior qualifies use of this strategy. Only when reason, aggression or reasoned aggression fail, employees resort to nonchalance. Technique spells exasperation in behaviour and mannerism at failure to comprehend logical arguments. Research on UI strategies could also consider the use of two additional strategies indicated by the participants – reasoned aggression and nonchalance. While no claims can be made to the existence of these tactics in all organizations and all persuasive situations, their presence

even in some instances in one company does generate interest. There could be a discrepancy in the understanding of the terms in the minds of the researcher and the participants. Defining the terms or using equivalent correlates would add value to the quality of research in diverse settings.

4. There is a positive relation between non-verbal signals and verbal cues used for persuasion. Organizational research on UI strategies may also benefit from examining the non-verbal signals used for persuasion. Research on non-verbal communication suggests different statistics that an individual employs while listening. It seems plausible to study the parameters of non-verbal signals and voice modulations in the process of UI as they play a significant role in the process of communication. I had not studied the significant and positive relationship between verbalization of a UI attempt and non-verbal cues and voice modulations. This relationship did not come to the fore as the process of data collection was interviews and analysis of transcripts of the recordings. If the influencing process could be captured on a video film, relationships between types of communication methods could be ascertained. Thus when making persuasive attempts, most employees can use cues for persuasion. Future studies could therefore benefit by examining relationships between new and old team players, and various types of communication methods used for convincing.

CONCLUSIONS

The key findings of this study are related to the use of UI strategies in a multinational FMCG organization. The choice of these tactics was determined by the position of the company in the global market – the impact of the global influence on the organizational

culture. These influences were partially mediated by witnessing behavioural traits in superiors as well as cultivating them for cohesion in the team and acceptance by the team members. From the descriptive perspective, team players who are not in sync with the rest of the team members or who do not abide by the cultural norms of the organization are misfits and would need to look for exit routes at the earliest. Thus ideally each participant following a different strategy in the organizational context for influencing may not necessarily work. Hence the need to work in situations in which being similar to one's superiors and their choice of strategies would yield the desired result.

From the perspective of the organization, successful UI influences suggest smooth functioning and good health. Thus, developing a culture conducive to open communication patterns is of paramount importance for organizational well-being. Understanding superiors, their expectations, constraints and being familiar with the types of communication (Kinesthetics and phatic) would aid in influencing. Familiarity with the organizational culture and formulation of tactic in strict adherence to the same would facilitate the UI process.

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Figure 1: Conceptual framework for a study of UI strategies in a FMCG organization

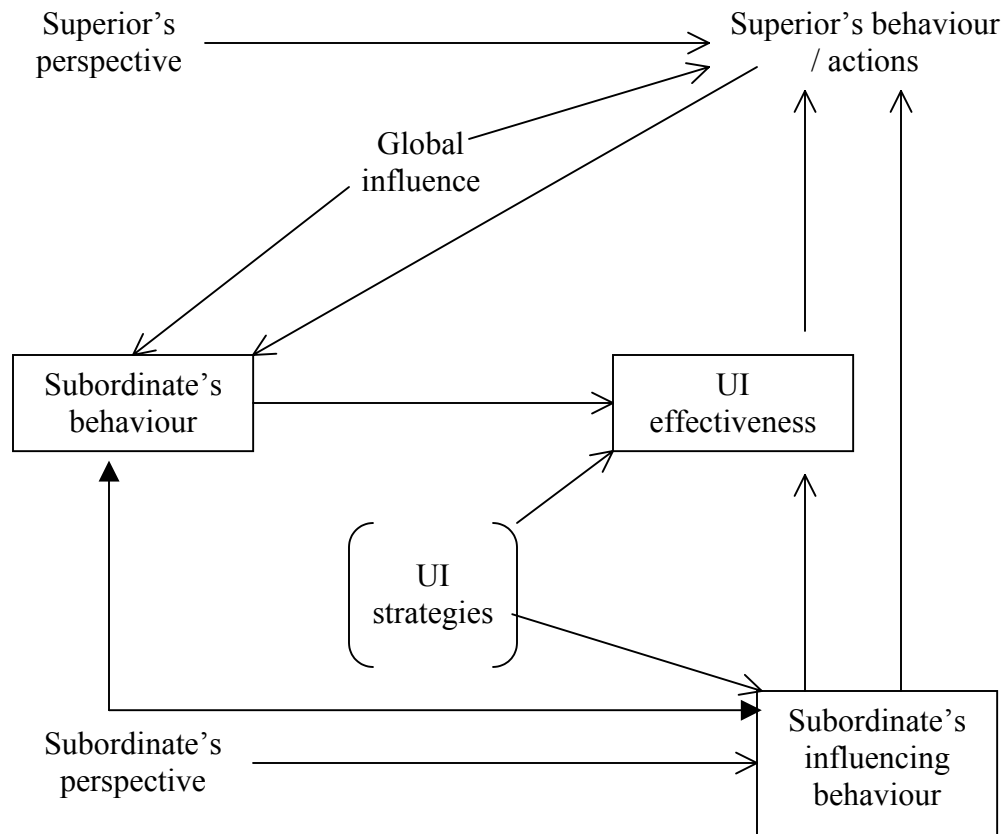


Figure 2: Influences and UI strategies

