Ingratiation as a political tactic: effects within the organization

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This article examines the place of organizational politics in general and ingratiation specifically as a tactic in which there is an attempt by individuals to increase their attractiveness and upward influence in the eyes of other organizational members (management). Four common tactics of ingratiators were identified: other enhancement, rendering favors, opinion conformity and self-presentation. Suggests that ingratiation is influenced by individual variables such as: Machiavellianism, locus of control and work task uniqueness. Furthermore, situational variables affect this political behavior. There were mixed research results on the impact of ingratiation on further career success. Some recent research concluded that this tactic has little or no effect on extrinsic and intrinsic rewards available to the individual.

Organizational politics: an introduction

The terms politics and power are sometimes used interchangeably. Though they are related, they are nonetheless distinct notions. Pfeffer defines organizational politics as:

> those activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or [disagreement] about choices (Pfeffer, 1989).

In a sense, the study of organizational politics constitutes the study of power in action. It may also be said that politics involves the playing out of power and influence.

The word politics has a somewhat negative connotation. It suggests that someone is attempting to use means or to gain ends that are not sanctioned by the organization. Actually, political behavior, as we have defined it, is quite neutral. Similarly, power is not inherently negative. Whether a person views power and politics as unsavory topics depends on a number of considerations, the most important perhaps being where the individual stands on a specific issue in a given situation. Nonetheless, most managers are reluctant to admit to the political character of their own work settings.

Organizational politics involve intentional acts of influence to enhance or protect the self-interest of individuals or groups (Allen *et al.,* 1979, p. 77). Organizational politics is often viewed as being dysfunctional to an organization. However, this is not always the case, and it should be noted that this definition of organizational politics states that organizational politics can be helpful, as well as harmful to the members of an organization and the organization itself (Kumar and Ghadially, 1989, p. 306). It is not uncommon for all members of an organization to exhibit political behavior. In the area of politics, everyone is a player. Subordinates, as well as their managers, can engage in the give-and-take of organizational politics. Nonetheless, it is widely believed that political behavior is far less common and less intense among employees in lower-level positions than among employees in higher-level positions. There are a variety of political tactics used by employees at virtually every organizational level that include forming coalitions and networks, impression management, information management, promote the opposition, pursue line responsibility and finally ingratiation which is the focus of this article. Each tactic will be briefly described.

Forming coalitions and networks
This political tactic consists of befriending important people. These people may not be in positions of any obvious political value. However, their jobs may provide them with information that could be useful to have. Some people find that forming friendships with people in upper-level management can help them gain access to important information.

Impression management
A simple tactic that virtually everyone uses from time to time is the management of their outward appearance and style. Generally, most organizations prefer a particular image that consists of being loyal, attentive, honest, neatly groomed, sociable, and so forth. By deliberately trying to exhibit this preferred image, an individual can make a positive impression on influential members of the organization.

Information management
A further tactic consists of managing the information that is shared with others. The nature, as well as the timing, of information given out can have strong effects on others' conduct. Releasing good or bad news when it is likely to have its fullest impact can greatly promote one person's self-interest or defeat the hopes of others. Similarly, an individual can ask for information (such as sales data or a production report) when it is most likely to make things appear particularly good or bad. People who play the information management game are not likely to lie or spread misinformation, however, because their future credibility would be jeopardized. Instead, they rely on the carefully planned release of valid information to obtain their ends (Vecchio and Appelbaum, 1995, p. 323).

Promote the opposition
It may sound strange, but one way to eliminate opposition is to aid political rivals. For

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example, it is possible to eliminate a political rival by helping that person become so successful that he or she is transferred to a desirable position some place else in the organization. Recommending a rival for a new assignment or even a promotion within another division of the organization can make one's own work life easier.

Pursue line responsibility
Within virtually every organization, some positions are more closely tied to the primary mission of the organization; the line positions. They are at the very heart of the organization. While staff people may come to wield great power within their own territories, it is the line people who usually "call the shots" on major issues. Line people not only make the more important decisions within the organization, they are also more likely to be promoted to top-level executive positions. In many organizations, there is a preferred department of origin and career path for top-level managers. These are usually line positions. Therefore, one way to gain influence within an organization is to be assigned initially to, or be transferred to, a line position. It will often provide more visibility, influence, and upward mobility.

Ingratiation
This tactic involves giving compliments or doing favors for superiors or co-workers. Most people have a difficult time rejecting the positive advances of others. Ingratiation usually works as a tactic insofar as the target often feels positive toward the source even if the ingratiation attempt is fairly blatant and transparent.

   In the behavioral sciences, the notion of "social reciprocity" has been offered to help explain the process of ingratiation. In social reciprocity, there is a feeling of a social obligation to repay the positive actions of others with similar actions. For example, if someone pays you a compliment, there is a strong expectation that you should respond with a compliment of your own. If you fail to do so, you may be judged as being rude. Similarly, ingratiation involves giving positive strokes to a person with expectation that he or she will feel obligated to return them in some form (Vecchio and Appelbaum, 1995, p. 324).

   This last tactic is one form of organizational politics that is commonly used within organizations. Ingratiation is actually defined as an attempt by individuals to increase their attractiveness in the eyes of others. The incidence of ingratiatory behavior is higher in the upper levels of management (Allen *et al.,* 1979, p. 80). However, at any level in the organization, superiors tend to use ingratiatory behaviors less than

subordinates. Thus, ingratiation tends to be used more as an upward influence process than as a downward influence process. It is with this importance that ingratiation has been identified as a critical political tactic and the focus of this article. However, it is equally necessary to describe other political strategies/tactics that are not as effective and positive as the six just presented. In fact, they may be categorized as devious in terms of their honesty and even morality.

Devious political tactics

Some political tactics are quite honest in nature. For example, accumulating seniority, providing copies of your accomplishments to your boss, and hitching your wagon to yourself are all respectable means of gaining influence. Some other tactics, however, are difficult to defend on moral grounds. In the interest of self-defence, it is worth examining three of these devious political tactics (DuBrin, 1978).

Take no prisoners
Sometimes it is necessary to do something unpopular or distasteful, such as demote or transfer someone or announce pay cuts. During corporate takeovers, many unpopular actions may be necessary. As a result, political enemies are likely to be made. One tactic for dealing with this potential problem is to ruthlessly eliminate all individuals who may resent your past actions by having them fired or transferred.

Divide and conquer
This tactic involves creating a feud among two or more people so that they will be continually off balance and thus unable to mount an attack against you. This is a very old idea that is still practiced in some work settings. An unscrupulous individual who employs this tactic usually encourages bickering between possible rivals by spreading rumors or promoting competition between subordinates or factions. This is a risky tactic, however, as the opponents may eventually compare notes and conclude that someone else is really responsible for creating and maintaining their bad feelings.

Exclude the opposition
Another devious tactic involves keeping rivals away from important meetings and social occasions. This can be done simply by scheduling important affairs when the opposition is out of town (on vacation or a business trip) or attending another meeting. With the opposition absent, it is possible to influence decision making or to take credit for a rival's efforts (Vecchio and Appelbaum, 1995, p. 325).

Ingratiation

In today's environment individuals are very concerned with developing career management strategies that will enhance their career success. One way that a person can impress others in his or her organization is by maintaining a high level of productivity at his or her job. A high level of productivity has always been highly correlated rightly or wrongly with an individual's career success and the number of organizational rewards he or she receives. However, it is also possible for a member of an organization to possibly improve his or her career success through the process of ingratiation in lieu of the aforementioned devious tactics. Subordinates may try to use ingratiation in order to increase the pay, promotions, and recognition that they receive within the organization. This can, of course, become a problem within an organization when individuals with low productivity levels (but with strong ingratiatory behaviors) begin to achieve greater career success than those individuals who are better performers, but do not engage in ingratiatory behaviors. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that ingratiation tactics, just like organizational politics in general, do not necessarily involve activities which are illicit or non-sanctioned by the organization, and in fact most ingratiatory strategies are not illicit (Wortman and Linsenmeier, 1977, p. 135). However, ingratiation can become detrimental to an organization if it becomes excessive (Wortman and Linsenmeier, 1977, p. 173).

Although ingratiation is often viewed as an individually initiated behavior, there is evidence that ingratiation is organizationally induced, as well as individually initiated, and it is the combination of these forces that determines the amount of ingratiation within an organization (Ralston, 1985, p. 477). Thus, management is left with the responsibility of structuring and controlling the organization in a way that limits the negative effects of ingratiatory behavior. Furthermore, since not all ingratiatory behavior is devious nor detrimental to the organization, allowing room for some ingratiatory behavior may also be an important asset to an organization. It is essential that managers learn more about this political process to enable them to assume a more effective role in the organization. This is the essential focus of this article. Topics to be explored include several definitions of ingratiation, individual and situational causes of ingratiating behaviors, choice of strategies to proceed or not to proceed, ingratiation and career success and finally some conclusions and suggestions for further research.

Ingratiation: what is it?

At the core of political influence behaviors are the upward influence tactics used by career aspirants to advance their career interests (Kipnis and Schmidt, 1988). While a number of upward influence tactics have been identified in the literature, the focus of this article will center about ingratiation. An initial empirical study of ingratiation, Jones (1964, p. 11) describes ingratiation as "a class of strategic behaviors illicitly designed to influence a particular other concerning the attractiveness of one's personal qualities". Wortman and Linsenmeier (1977, p. 134) also defined ingratiation similarly as "a class of strategic behaviors employed by a person to make himself more attractive to another".

A review of 40 years of studies on "strategic ingratiation" confirms our worst fears: kissing up to the boss, who often sees through it, pays off.

"Strategic ingratiation" is defined as tactical moves to increase likeability or to get "a raise, promotion or positive evaluation". "It is not so much just being a good political animal … but ingratiation shrewdly employed will get you ahead," said Randall Gordon, a University of Minnesota psychologist who recently reviewed 69 studies on ingratiation (Kelleher, 1996, p. B1). This definition is somewhat broader in scope. It does not imply (as do other definitions) that ingratiatory behaviors always are deceitful and illicit, or driven by attempts to exert influence and/or make political gains (Linden and Mitchell, 1988, p. 573). This definition suggests individuals use ingratiation simply in order to be liked.

Another definition of ingratiation defines the concept as "a set of assertive tactics which have the purpose of gaining approbation of an audience that controls significant rewards for the actor" (Tedeschi and Melburg, 1984). This definition is more balanced and captures the essence of ingratiatory behavior as a proactive behavior used to enhance the probability of receiving desired rewards in the future, and can also be easily related to an organizational setting.

As can be inferred through Wortman and Linsenmeier's (1977) definition of ingratiation, ingratiatory behaviors may or may not be assertive in nature and may or may not be premeditated. Thus it is important not to immediately assess ingratiation as being a manipulative and deceptive process. Regardless of the intent of the ingratiator, four common tactics of ingratiators have been identified. These tactics include other enhancement, rendering favors, opinion conformity, and self presentation (Jones, 1964, p. 34; Tedeschi and Melburg, 1984, p. 137; Wortman

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and Linsenmeier, 1977). A brief description
will illuminate some differences.

Other enhancement involves expressing
favorable opinions and evaluations of the
target person by the ingratiating individual.
The effectiveness of such a tactic stems from
the fact that when a person perceives that
another is favorably disposed towards them,
he or she tends to like the other individual in
return (Wortman and Linsenmeier, 1997,
p. 142). The use of praise, approbation and
flattery in order to raise a person's self-
esteem are all forms of other enhancement.

Rendering favors, the second tactic, is often
combined with the technique of other
enhancement and is based on the concept
that the target individual will feel a sense of
debt toward the ingratiating individual, as
well as see the individual as a helpful and
friendly person.

The third type of ingratiating behavior is
opinion conformity. Opinion conformity con-
sists of a person expressing an opinion or
behaving in a manner that is consistent with
the opinions, judgments, or behavior of the
target individual (Jones, 1964, p. 34). Whereas
the tactic of other enhancement attempts to
capitalize on the proposition that individuals
like individuals who seem to like them, the
conformity tactic follows another proposition:
persons like individuals whose values and
beliefs appear to be similar to their own. This
indirect form of flattery is typified by the sub-
ordinate who criticizes the ability of a supe-
rior's peer simply because the subordinate
knows that the superior does not agree with
the other individual (Ralston, 1985, p. 477).

Finally, the fourth type of ingratiation
behavior, self-presentation is regarded as
behaving in a manner perceived to be appro-
priate by the target person (i.e. person being
ingratiated) or in a manner to which this
individual will be attracted. Jones and
Wortman (1973) noted that self-presentation
has two interrelated characteristics:
1 providing explicit descriptors about one's
   own characteristics and behavior, and
2 behaving in ways that imply one possesses
   certain characteristics.

Causes of ingratiatory behaviors

Individual behaviors
As previously stated in the article, ingratia-
tion is not only individually initiated but it is
also influenced by situational variables.
Ralston (1985, p. 479) identified the following
three individual factors that he determined to
be significant in encouraging ingratiatory
behaviors: Machiavellianism, locus of con-
trol, and work task uniqueness. An individ-
ual's unique characteristics are a result of a

person's personality and achieved character-
istics. A person's personality is defined as the
relatively enduring traits and dispositions
that form a pattern distinguishing one person
from all others (Vecchio and Appelbaum,
1995, p. 87). Machiavellianism and locus of
control are both personality factors where
task uniqueness is regarded as an achieved
characteristic (Ralston, 1985, p. 480). These
achieved characteristics are abilities devel-
oped by an individual.

Machiavellian-type individuals are
described as manipulative and having little
care for the feelings or wellbeing of others
(Ralston, 1985, p. 480). Individuals high in
Machiavellianism try to control and manipu-
late others by using tactics such as ingratia-
tion much more often than individuals that
are seen as having a low level of Machiavel-
lianism. Pandey and Rastogi (1979, p. 224)
have given support to this conclusion through
experiments where individuals judged high
in Machiavellianism used ingratiation tactics
much more often than those individuals
judged as being low in Machiavellianism.

Christie and Geis (1970) have tried to assess
the extent to which an individual's personal
style is Machiavellian in nature. To do so,
they converted certain basic tenets of Machi-
avelli's writing into an attitude scale that can
be used to measure the extent to which an
individual agrees with Machiavelli's views.
The statements of the Machiavellian scale (or
Mach scale for short) focus on several factors.
Chief among them are:
• the use of manipulative interpersonal tac-
  tics ("It is wise to flatter important people"
  and "Never tell anyone the real reason you
  did something unless it is useful to do so");
  and
• an unfavorable view of human nature
  ("Generally speaking, people won't work
  hard unless they are forced to do so" and
  "Anyone who completely trusts anyone else
  is asking for trouble").

A good deal is known about people who score
high in agreement with Machiavelli's views
(Gemmil and Heisler, 1972). Generally, they
are able to control social interactions and
effectively manipulate others. They are also
especially effective in using their skills in
face-to-face setting (Vecchio and Appelbaum,
1995, p. 328).

Psychologist Julian Rotter (1943, 1966) pro-
posed that the likelihood of an individual's
engaging in a particular act is a function of:
• the person's expectancy that the act will
  yield rewards; and
• the personal value of those rewards to the
  individual.

In essence, Rotter's proposal rests on the
notion of locus of control. Locus of control is

the extent to which individuals believe that control over their lives lies within their own control or in environmental forces beyond their control. Someone who strongly believes that he or she controls events has a high internal locus of control, while someone who feels that he or she is at the mercy of fate has a high external locus of control (Vecchio and Appelbaum, 1995, p. 97).

Research based on the locus-of-control concept has yielded interesting results. It has been found for example that internally oriented individuals are less likely to respond to group pressures or persuasive communications (Lefcourt, 1972).

It is perhaps not surprising that compared to externally-oriented individuals, internally oriented individuals have higher incomes, hold jobs of higher status, and advance more rapidly in their careers (Andrisani and Nestel, 1976). What perhaps is surprising is that scores on Rotter's scale have been shifting over the past two decades, with test scores revealing that Americans appear to be becoming more externally oriented (Rotter, 1975).

Finally, it should be noted that internally- and externally-oriented individuals differ in the kinds of rewards they prefer. Externally-oriented individuals, who believe that forces beyond their control are responsible for success, tend to prefer such extrinsic rewards as increased pay and job security. In contrast, internally-oriented individuals usually prefer intrinsic (self-supplied) rewards such as a feeling of accomplishment and sense of achievement (Baron and Ganz, 1972). The implication is fairly clear: managers who understand their "subordinates" loci of control can better tailor their reward systems to reflect individual needs (Vecchio and Appelbaum, 1995, p. 98).

An individual's locus of control depends on whether a person attributes their success or failure to external or internal causes. Individuals with an external locus of control attribute their outcomes to external events which they believe are out of their control. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that their efforts will have a direct effect on their future outcomes. Ralston (1985, p. 480) states that an individual with an internal locus of control is more likely to use ingratiation tactics to influence people due to his or her belief that he or she has control over his or her success or failure.

An individual's skill uniqueness depends on the person's job and the person's expertise at his or her job. When an individual's skills are not significant to distinguish that person from others, he or she must seek different means of influence (Ralston, 1985, p. 480). Therefore, a person who is high in Machiavellianism , has an internal locus of control and is low in skill

uniqueness will tend to use ingratiation tactics more often than other individuals as a strategy for influencing supervisors and obtaining greater organizational rewards.

In direct contrast to the theoretical findings of Ralston (1985, p. 480) are the findings of a study by Aryee *et al.* (1993, p. 203). This empirical study of the use of ingratiation as a career management strategy found no significant relationship between Machiavellianism and ingratiation. This finding is consistent with the findings of Pandey and Rastogi (1979, p. 225). Locus of control was also found to be an insignificant determinant of ingratiation. A possible reason for this finding is that individuals with an internal locus of control did not perceive ingratiation as being instrumental to their career success (Ayree *et al.,* 1993, p. 204). The only personality variable found to have a significant positive relationship with ingratiation in this study was the need for achievement. Thus, it is suggested that individuals with a desire to get ahead in organizations are more willing to engage in political processes in order to be successful. Furthermore, when Aryee *et al.* (1993, p. 203) tested for interaction effects among the individual variables, no interaction effects were found to be significant. These results also counter Ralston's (1985, p. 481) belief that the interaction between the individual variables would have a positive relationship with ingratiation.

Situational variables
Ralston (1985, p. 481) also identified three situational factors that lead to ingratiatory behavior. These three situational factors are: the decision making style of the task unit, the ambiguity of a work task, and the scarcity of resources. These relatively permanent situational factors are usually determined by the organization. Thus, the organization plays a key role in the degree to which ingratiatory behaviors are prevalent within an organization.

The first situational variable proposed by Ralston is a task unit's management style in which the task unit is focused upon a group instead of the entire organization since the differing behaviors in task units may be averaged out if the entire organization is analyzed. Ralston (1985, p. 482) studied the various leadership styles that supervisors use. The two main types of leadership styles identified were autocratic and democratic styles. Autocratic managers view subordinates as needing a great deal of direction and guidance, and therefore the autocratic manager tends to be very controlling. Democratic managers view subordinates as having self-control, and being internally instead of externally motivated. By their very nature of leadership, autocratic managers are suppressing employee's

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opportunities to express themselves through creativity and initiative. Therefore, subordinates tend to look to other tactics such as ingratiation in order to distinguish themselves from the other workers. Thus, an autocratic style of leadership encourages ingratiatory behaviors much more than a democratic style of management does.

As an example, a manager's choice of a particular leadership model as a guide to personal conduct depends on his or her goals and on the specific situation. An initial issue is whether the individual hopes to maximize a given outcome, such as satisfaction or performance. Some models, such as Fiedler's (1984) contingency model, are silent on the dimension of satisfaction, and therefore might be eliminated from competition. The next step is to examine the situational variables identified by the models to determine whether they are pertinent to the actual work setting. Such an exercise can provide insights into which model is most appropriate to "a given manager in a specific situation" (Vecchio and Appelbaum, 1995, p. 380).

The second situational variable proposed by Ralston (1985, p. 483) is the ambiguity of a work task. Uncertainty occurs for individual in a work group when tasks are not clearly identified by management. Under these circumstances an employee is uncertain on whether his performance on the task will have the desired outcome. Thus, the more ambiguous a task is, the greater the possibility of an individual using ingratiatory behavior. This concept receives further support from research by Parker *et al.* (1995, p. 893). Their study illustrated that formalization of goals, roles and procedures leads to a decrease in political behavior by reducing members' ambiguity in objectives.

Different groups sometimes send different signals, as when a supervisor's subordinates indicate that they would like less pressure for production, while his or her superiors simultaneously insist on higher levels of output. Differing signals from evaluating groups and individuals result in role conflict. On occasion, the messages that evaluators send are not clear, or they give incomplete information, which leads to role ambiguity. At each step in the role episode, poor communication and other obstacles may interfere with the process.

Although role conflict and role ambiguity seem to be undesirable, there are some indications that in modest amount and under the right conditions, they may actually have positive effects. In fact, a work setting that is totally devoid of conflict and ambiguity can be dull and uninspiring. Thus, in order to avoid stagnation and encourage innovation, managers should perhaps seek to create a

productive level of conflict and ambiguity (Vecchio and Appelbaum, 1995, p. 458).

The third situational factor leading to ingratiatory behavior is resource scarcity. Resource scarcity occurs when the resources of one group are controlled by another group, or individual (Ralston, 1985, p. 483). Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) have proposed yet another view of how organizations relate to their environments. In their resource dependence model, they contend that organizations are highly dependent on their external environments for raw resources and markets. The success of any organization is, therefore, a function of the extent to which the organization can manage its environment. Because organizations are vulnerable to their environments, they must take action to reduce or eliminate their dependency. An organization may attempt an internal change in order to deal with its vulnerability. These internal changes include increases in structural complexity and the creation of boundary-spanning roles (Vecchio and Appelbaum, 1995, p. 634). In an organization, management has control of the rewards that subordinates receive. Subordinates do not have formal influence over their supervisors; therefore subordinates often use other influence tactics in order to ensure that they receive the rewards they feel that they deserve. Thus, when resources are relatively scarce, subordinates will increase their use of ingratiatory behaviors to increase their attractiveness to their supervisors in order to receive more organizational rewards.

Aryee *et al.* (1993, p. 207) found that situational variables accounted for most of the explained variance in ingratiation, although the explained variance was small. However, the situational variables found to be significant in this study slightly varied from the situational variables proposed by Ralston (1985, p. 481). The variables that were found to have a significant relationship with ingratiation were supervisor's reward power and task ambiguity. Supervisor's reward power is equivalent to the situational variable that Ralston (1985, p. 483) labelled as scarcity of resources. Task ambiguity was also found to be significant with ingratiation, which is also consistent with Ralston's (1985, p. 483) proposition. However, Aryee *et al.* (1993, p. 203) found no significance between leadership style and ingratiation. Another finding from this study was that the relationship between the norm of organizational politics within organization and ingratiation was determined to be insignificant. This is surprising because the decision to use ingratiation may be facilitated by one's perception of the extent to which the organization legitimizes political activity and, thereby reduces the risk of ingratiation

backfiring (Ayree *et al.,* 1993, p. 207; Linden and Mitchell, 1988, p. 579).

Further evidence that ingratiatory behaviors can be indirectly encouraged by an organization's permanent situational variables is given by Cheng (1983). He demonstrated that employees who believe that their organizational climate is negative are more inclined to engage in ingratiatory behavior than employees who feel that they are in a positive climate. Furthermore, it is proposed that individuals will be more inclined to use ingratiatory strategies when the individual is highly dependent on other organizational members for completing tasks, for gaining information, resources, or other support, and when criteria for appraisals of job performance and job behaviors are highly subjective (Linden and Mitchell, 1988, p. 576). Linden and Mitchell (1988, p. 576) further propose that ingratiatory behaviors will be greater in organizations with few established personnel policies, and policies that do exist but are not well supervised.

The use of ingratiation tactics is also influenced by temporary situational factors. These factors usually are short lived and are not determined by the structure of the organization. For instance, when a subordinate is asked for his or her opinion of the boss by the boss's secretary, the subordinate may use this as an excellent opportunity to ingratiate the boss through a third person (Linden and Mitchell, 1988, p. 575). Individuals that are high in self-monitoring skills may be extremely talented at identifying such situations.

Choice of ingratiation strategy (to proceed or not to proceed)

An individual within an organization must personally decide whether or not he or she should proceed with their ingratiation strategy. Linden and Mitchell (1988, p. 576) proposed that the choice of an ingratiation strategy, including the choice of whether or not to go through with the strategy, depends on an individual's perception of the risk involved with the strategy. The degree of the perceived risk is based on the following factors:
• the cause of the ingratiation attempt;
• the perceived cost benefit ratio;
• the perception of the target's susceptibility to an ingratiation attempt; and
• the analysis of whether or not situational variables encourage an ingratiation attempt (Linden and Mitchell, 1988, p. 576).

The cause of the ingratiation attempt can be examined from Tedeschi and Melburg's (1984) assessment of whether or not an ingratiation attempt is for defensive or assertive reasons. Defensive ingratiation attempts are used in order to protect oneself following poor

performance. In these types of defensive situations, the ingratiator would act immediately. The ingratiator may try to evoke sympathy from his or her supervisor in order to make it difficult for the supervisor to carry out any form of punishment affecting the individual. Assertive ingratiation attempts are generally directed at long-term goals (Tedeschi and Melburg, 1984). Assertive uses of ingratiation are proactive instead of reactive and are often used by a subordinate as a way of promoting himself, or enhancing a directed target person. Linden and Mitchell (1988, p. 577) propose that defensive ingratiation attempts involve greater risk than assertive attempts and, therefore are used much more cautiously.

The next factor in Linden and Mitchell's (1988, p. 578) model is the perceived costs and benefits of the ingratiation attempt. The costs of the ingratiation attempt are usually dependent on the degree to which the target of the ingratiation attempt believes the ingratiator has an ulterior motive (Wortman and Linsenmeier, 1977, p. 144). This situation could result in numerous detours or unsuccessful attempts to the ingratiator including public ridicule and the possibility of the loss of trust from his or her supervisor. However, there are also many potential benefits from an ingratiation attempt which include the possibility of career advancement. The individual must weigh the perceived costs and benefits of the ingratiation attempt, and then must decide whether or not to go through with the attempt, and what strategy to use if they choose to proceed.

The third factor used to determine whether or not to proceed with an ingratiation strategy is the perceived target's susceptibility to an ingratiation attempt (Linden and Mitchell, 1988, p. 508). This factor depends on the potential ingratiator's assessment of the potential target individual. An ingratiation attempt will only be successful when the target perceives it to be sincere. If the ingratiator determines that the target is highly trusting, and maybe even somewhat gullible, the decision to use an ingratiation strategy may not appear to involve a large degree of risk. Thus, the individual will be more likely to carry out the ingratiation strategy.

The final factor in the model is the situational determinants (Linden and Mitchell, 1988, p. 579). An individual must assess whether or not a given situation is conducive or not for engaging in ingratiatory behavior. Some organizations promote ingratiation by way of their structure and culture, while other organizations do not (Cheng, 1983; Ralston, 1985, p. 477). The individual must determine whether or not the situational variables supportive of an ingratiation attempt are present.

The impact of this strategy upon career success will be examined next.

Ingratiation and career success

An important area of research concerning ingratiation is whether or not a subordinate could use the tactic of ingratiation to actually further his or her career success. Most research on career success traditionally has been dominated by rational models, in which organizations establish career systems and promotion strategies designed to reward the most productive employees. However, there are some studies focusing on the use of political processes to increase career success. Wortman and Linsenmeier (1977, p. 139) have stated that a person could receive higher performance appraisals through the process of ingratiation as a positive career enhancer.

Further evidence that the use of ingratiating behaviors can be beneficial to one's career is found in a study by Kipnis and Vanderveer (1971, p. 283). This study compared the performance appraisals of three different classes of workers. The first class consisted of average performing workers judged to be high in the use of ingratiating behaviors. The next group of workers consisted of average performing workers who had been judged to be low in the use of ingratiating behaviors. Finally, the third group of workers were regarded as high performers who did not engage in ingratiating behaviors. The results of the study revealed that both the ingratiators and the superior performers were given significantly higher performance evaluations than the average workers who did not engage in ingratiatory behaviors. Furthermore, the ingratiators' performance evaluation scores were not significantly lower than those of the superior workers, suggesting that the ingratiators' flattery had successfully influenced the subject's opinions (Kipnis and Vanderveer, 1971, p. 283). The findings supported the belief that the ingratiator can render more of the rewards available than an equally competent non-ingratiator. It should also be noted that this study obtained these results even when the subjects had objective information on the output of each worker. Therefore, in situations where task performance is less identifiable, the ingratiator should be even more effective in obtaining greater organizational rewards. In essence, the strategy has some merit.

A reason given for the fact that ingratiatory behaviors have such positive effects on performance appraisals and on other extrinsic rewards is presented by Cardy and Dobbins (1986, p. 672). This research suggests that ingratiation, as a political influence tactic, influences success through the social psychological process of "affect" which is manifested in the performance ratings subordinates receive from their supervisor. Wayne and Ferris (1990, p. 495) conducting similar research reported that ingratiatory behaviors positively influenced the supervisor reactions toward subordinates, as well as their performance ratings. Ingratiation affects the way a supervisor recalls information about the subordinate in a halo type effect resulting in the supervisor recalling positive employee behaviors and ignoring contradictory information (Wayne and Ferris, 1990, p. 488). Pandey (1981, p. 65) further explained this by suggesting the inflated performance ratings given by supervisors to individuals who use ingratiating behaviors, are the result of the ingratiator controlling the behavior of the supervisor by the means of reciprocity. In other words, the supervisor feels obligated to return the ingratiatory behavior of the subordinate. This is a powerful technique to modify and control behavior and consequences.

Judge and Bretz (1994, p. 44) conducted the first study of political influence behavior as a measure of total career success. This study examined the effects that the use of ingratiation had on a person's career success. Career success was defined as the outcomes on achievements one has accumulated as result of one's work experience (Judge and Bretz, 1994, p. 47). The outcomes that comprised career success consisted of both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Extrinsic factors include pay, promotions, and status. Although these extrinsic factors are the traditional way that a person measures career success, intrinsic factors can be viewed as being equally if not more important. Judge and Bretz (1994, p. 47) defined intrinsic rewards as consisting of job and life satisfaction. Since it is possible for a person to achieve significant extrinsic success in a job, but not feel successful or satisfied with his or her achievements, intrinsic and extrinsic success should not be regarded as equivalent.

The results of the Judge and Bretz research (1994, p. 54) provided the first direct support for the role of ingratiatory behavior in predicting overall career success. The findings indicated that ingratiatory behavior positively predicted extrinsic career success. An individual who used a high degree of ingratiatory behavior towards his or her supervisor had a significantly higher degree of extrinsic career success than one who chose to employ this tactic to a lesser extent. Furthermore, ingratiatory behavior was also significantly positive in predicting intrinsic career success. Individuals who used ingratiatory behaviors toward supervisors more often reported a higher level of job and

personal satisfaction than those who used these tactics less (Judge and Bretz, 1994, p. 54).

Another study examining the effects of the influence process of integration on career success produced inconsistent findings compared to the previously mentioned studies (Ayree *et al.,* 1996, p. 107). This study referred to the concept of a boundary-less career which implied independence from rather than dependence on traditional organizational career principles (Ayree *et al.,* 1996, p. 96). Thus, what is important from this study indicated that an individual is on his or her own in developing a career. Therefore, it is important for an individual to pursue career growth through strategies rather than relying solely on his or her performance on the job. Ingratiation is one such technique for attempting to further one's career.

The results of this study demonstrated that the use of ingratiation had no significant effect on extrinsic career success, such as salary increases and promotions received. Furthermore, the results also revealed that the use of ingratiatory behaviors had no significant effect on intrinsic rewards such as career satisfaction (Ayree *et al.,* 1996, p. 107). However, it must be understood that this study was conducted in the Far East and may not be easily replicated nor generalized to Western organization due to cultural variables not controlled for in the principal investigation.

Additionally, another study by Thacker and Wayne (1995, p. 748) focusing upon the effects of ingratiation tactics upon assessments of promotability also led to results inconsistent with earlier findings. This study included both subjective and objective measures of the assessments of promotability. Ingratiation was found to be significantly related to promotability; however, it also produced a negative correlation. Interestingly, an earlier study additionally found that the use of ingratiation by subordinates did not have a significant effect on pay increases (Martin, 1987, p. 425).

Reasons given for the findings of these recent studies with mixed results are found in earlier research. One problem with ingratiation is that there is a possibility that the supervisor will attribute the complimentary and conforming behavior expressions of the ingratiation to ulterior motives or manipulative intentions, which will likely lead to a decrease in "liking" (Kipnis and Schmidt, 1988; Wortman and Linsenmeier, 1997, p. 144). An alternative explanation is that since such positive feelings, specifically regarding the supervisor, are given by the subordinate, subjects also may have felt that there is no need to give the person a pay raise or promotion in order to retain his or her services. (Martin, 1987, p. 427).

Managerial implications and research implications: impact of influence and politics

Ingratiation is a prevalent part of contemporary organization behavior. Ingratiation is a form of organizational politics, and is used as an upward influence strategy, but it is a distinct construct with its own set of causes and parameters which is driven by the basic desire to be liked, and by particular needs and opportunities to look good in the eyes of others. It is viewed as a powerful tool and therefore is often attempted by many different individual within an organization.

Subordinate ingratiation is associated with the individual's desire to obtain greater rewards from the organization (Rao *et al.,* 1995, p. 147). Thus, subordinates try to use ingratiation as an attempt to secure better performance appraisals, which in turn lead to increases in promotions and salary. However, the empirical evidence examined correlating ingratiation and the factors of career success yield mixed results. Early studies often supported ingratiation and performance appraisals being positively related (Cardy and Dobbins, 1986, p. 675; Judge and Bretz, 1994, p. 54; Kipnis and Vanderveer, 1971, p. 283; Wayne and Ferris, 1990, p. 495; Wortman and Linsenmeirer, 1977, p. 139), but some recent research has shown conflicting evidence (Ayree *et al.,* 1993, p. 107; Martin, 1987, p. 425; Rao *et al.,* 1995, p. 58; Thacker and Wayne, 1995, p. 748). These studies conclude that ingratiation has little to no effect on the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards available to an individual. One possible explanation for the differences in results is that managers are becoming more critical and objective when assessing an individual attempt at ingratiation. However, it is very difficult for a manager to assess the true meaning behind a subordinate's behavior because an ingratiator's true intentions are not overtly perceivable. As a result, more research must be guided toward determining if evaluators actually have become better equipped and trained at determining the true intentions of a subordinate's behavior when they are evaluating the subordinate, or if the results may be due to differences between the experiments, or even some other factors. Further studies could also be directed at determining the cognitive information processes of performance evaluators as an added factor needing explanation to help determine if ingratiation actually does influence the cognitive component of the target individual. This may lead to a better understanding of the assessment process affecting promotability.

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The pressing question of whether ingratiation plays a functional or dysfunctional role in an organization still remains an unanswered question. When workers low in productivity happen to achieve greater organizational success than workers who are evaluated as being highly productive, through the process of ingratiation, then this tactic can be looked upon as being dysfunctional to an organization. However, there is no clear evidence that this is a consistent result. Furthermore, there is some evidence that ingratiation, used as a career management strategy, may be beneficial to an organization and its employees. The use of ingratiation may actually enrich an employee's life and job (Judge and Bretz, 1994, p. 54). If ingratiation leads to increased satisfaction for employees of the organization, then it may be possible for an organization to reduce the extrinsic rewards given to employees when the incidence of ingratiation increases. If earlier research is correct in assessing that ingratiation becomes dysfunctional when it is excessive, research needs to be conducted to determine what the level of ingratiation is which maximizes an organization's effectiveness.

The empirical literature seems to examine the notion of whether ingratiation is a result of individual behaviors, or situational variables. The findings on this topic are again mixed. However, recent evidence by Ayree *et al.* (1993, p. 207) reveal that situational variables account for most of the variation in ingratiation. This has important organizational and managerial implications. If situational variables are truly the factors that lead to excessive amounts of ingratiation in an organization, then it is possible for managers to structure the organization in a way that controls the amount of ingratiation present. However, the amount of ingratiation explained by the situational variables is very small compared to the amount of ingratiation that is not explained within organization. Therefore, further research is needed in this instance to determine other important variables that may help explain the variation in ingratiation.

Finally, another direction for future research may be to examine the weights that individuals attach to the cost/benefit ratio, cause for using ingratiation, perception of target susceptibility, and the situational conduciveness when assessing the risk that accompanies the use of ingratiation. If these weights per variable were known it would be much more lucid and effective to assess the situations where ingratiation is most likely to occur and, therefore have more control over them.

"Basically, everyone loves to be flattered." Well, not everyone, says Warren Bennis, a University of Southern California professor of business administration and author of several books on leadership. Ingratiation, he warns, can backfire.

"It is dangerous," he said. "T.S. Eliot wrote about it in his play *Murder in the Cathedral.* Henry II said, 'I wish he were out of the way,' referring to Sir Thomas Becket. Four of his loyal barons, with a kind of destructive obedience, went out and murdered him without asking if the king meant it."

Organizationally, Bennis says, businesses that reward ingratiators suffer from a dearth of creative ideas, scrutiny and constructive criticism. The best businesses are led by people who ignore fatuous flattery for "the single most important quality of a follower, which is to tell the truth" (Kelleher, 1996, p. B2).

Clearly, the effects that ingratiation has upon an organization is an area of study and application requiring further research. Until this research is conducted many of the underlying processes and the resultant effects of ingratiation will remain unclear and enigmatic.

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Application questions

1 Is it, in your experience, a more profitable political tactic in organizations to do as Warren Bennis suggests (quoted by the author) and "tell the truth" rather than flatter? What kind of leaders in what kind of organizations do you think would respond to honesty not flattery?

2 Is politics in organizations a good thing? A bad thing? A necessary thing? Can politics ever be designed out?