Upward Influence Tactics: Proposition and Examination on Model of Cultural Integration

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Upward influence tactics (UIT) have been a significant research topic for both Western and East Asian researchers. As cultural differences lead to different UIT, scholars often adopt different cultural approaches to investigate the differences in UIT across different cultural areas. Specifically, some scholars assumed that Western UIT is culturally universal and directly applied Western UIT models into East Asia, while others adopt an indigenous approach to explore the Eastern UIT from an emic perspective. Despite the considerable amount of studies, different research approaches have led to disagreements and overlaps in the content of UIT, signaling a need for an integrative framework on UIT contents from different cultures. As such, this study aims to provide an integrative framework that can integrate and classify UIT from Western and East Asia. Specifically, we first conducted a review of previous literature on UIT and selected 28 representative UITs. We illustrated an integrative, two-dimensional framework based on these 28 UITs and examine its validity. Subsequently, we recruited 285 participants and requested them to rate each UIT in terms of similarity with others. We adopted Multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) to analyze the data. The results support the two-dimensional framework, and finally we discuss future directions and provide research suggestions to contribute to future exploration of UIT.

Keywords: *upward influence tactics, culture integrative model, multi-dimensional scaling method*

Extended Abstract

Influence has long been regarded a key factor in determining the effectiveness of managers. Generally, the top-down influence exercised by supervisors has been the focal point of studies on the supervisor-subordinate relationship. However, subordinates do not simply accept the influence of supervisors; rather, they themselves actively engage in "upward influence." Previous studies have found that subordinates employ upward influence tactics (UIT) to help achieve task objectives and highlight that UIT is an important topic in organizational research (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988).

As research on this topic accumulates, scholars have noticed that UIT are strongly determined by cultural contexts (Fu & Yukl, 2000; Fu et al., 2004). Initially, researchers predominantly explored UIT only

within Western organizations (e.g., Kipnis et al., 1980; Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990). Subsequently, recognizing that cultural differences might influence the content of UIT, researchers employed a cross-cultural approach to study UIT in non-Western cultures (e.g., Fu & Yukl, 2000; Fu et al., 2004; Kennedy et al., 2003; Leong et al., 2007).

However, although the cross-culture approach has enriched the knowledge of the nature of UIT, scholars have noted that this approach tends to exclude culturally specific UIT for measurement equivalence, lessening the ability of researchers to comprehensively grasp the nature of UIT (Morris et al., 1999). Thus, researchers have adopted an alternative approach to investigate UIT within East Asia (e.g., Lee & Chi, 2004; Huang et al., 2010; Sun & Bond, 1999). Table 1 describes the UIT research using

Table.1
UIT from Different Approaches

UIT Dimension	West Indigenous				Cross-culture			East Indigenous	
	Kipnis et al.（1980）	Schriesheim & Hinkin （1990）	Yukl & Falbe （1990）	Yukl & Tracey （1992）	Ralston et al. （1994）	Fu & Yukl （2000）	Kennedy et al. （2003）	Sun & Bond （2000）	Huang et al. （2010）
Ingratiation	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Rationality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Pressure (Assertiveness/Pressure)	○	○	○	○		○	○		
Sanction	○								
Exchange	○	○	○	○		○	○		
Upward Appeal	○	○	○			○	○		
Blocking	○								
Coalitions	○	○	○	○		○	○		
Inspirational Appeals			○	○			○		
Consultation Tactics			○	○			○		
Personal Appeal				○			○		
Legitimating				○					
Good Soldier					○				
Image Management					○				
Personal Networking					○				
Informational Control					○				
Strong-arm Coercion					○				
Gifts/Favors						○	○		
Written Explanation							○		
Apprising							○		
Collaboration							○		
Persistence							○		
Socializing							○		
Informal Approach							○		
Contingent Control								○	
Gentle Persuasion								○	
Bypassing Pressuring									○
Private Request									○

each approach.

To further capture the diversity of UIT, scholars have proposed categorizing frameworks to consolidate the UIT derived using these different approaches (Fu et al., 2004; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985; Sun & Bond, 1999; Huang et al., 2010). However, these frameworks have

some limitations that hinder their ability to integrate the results from different cultural research approaches. First, the categorizing framework proposed by Kipnis and Schmidt (1985) does not include UIT from the Eastern research approach, while that of Huang et al. (2010) does not include UIT from the Western research approach, undermining both frameworks' ability to integrate the findings from different cultures. Second, the categorizing frameworks proposed by Kipnis and Schmidt (1985), Sun and Bond (1999), and Fu et al. (2004) regard upward, horizontal, and downward influence tactics as the same, blurring the distinctions among the different directions of influence and diminishing the ability of the frameworks to integrate different kinds of UIT. Last, in terms of analytical methods, categorizing frameworks often use factor analysis to categorize UIT into a single factor, making it difficult to clarify the extent of individual UIT across different cultural dimensions (Davidson & Skay, 1991), again undermining the frameworks' integrating capacity.

To summarize, current categorizing frameworks struggle to consolidate UIT across different cultural research approaches. We therefore develop a categorizing framework that effectively reflects the similarities and differences among UIT derived from different approaches by including UIT from Western studies, Eastern studies, and cross-cultural studies. In the following sections, we present the categorizing framework, which includes cultural dimensions and UIT gleaned from the different research approaches. We adopt multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) analysis to examine the proposed framework.

Cultural Dimensions

We adopt two dimensions, "Homonomous orientation-Autonomous orientation" and "Particularism-Universalism", to construct a categorizing framework capable of reflecting the similarities and differences in UIT. We introduce these two dimensions separately and illustrate their ability to reflect the differences in UIT across cultures.

Homonomous Orientation and Autonomous Orientation

Homonomous orientation and autonomous orientation represent the fundamental ways in which individuals define their relationships with others. Yang (2004), referencing Angyal (1941), indicated that these orientations affect how individuals interact with their environment. A homonomous orientation is an adaptive orientation that emphasizes that individuals should adjust their desires to accommodate the requirements of their environment. Conversely, an autonomous orientation is an expansive orientation that emphasizes that individuals should dominate their environment to align it with their desires. An individual's preferred orientation largely depends on the relative strengths of these contrasting tendencies (Yang, 2004). When one orientation is stronger than the other, it dominates an individual's tendencies in social interactions.

In essence, the Homonomous orientation-Autonomous orientation dimension represents the fundamental principles that individuals use to define upward influence situations. Specifically, UIT violate the chain of command and may even challenge the authority of superiors. Therefore, subordinates need to weigh the relative importance of accommodating their superior's preferences (homonomous orientation) against expressing their own ideas (autonomous orientation) to select appropriate UIT (Epitropaki & Martin, 2013). Previous studies have found that the Homonomous orientation-Autonomous orientation dimension also reflects cultural differences (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Varnum et al., 2010; Yang, 2004), indicating that it can effectively distinguish UIT derived from different cultural research approaches.

Particularism and Universalism

The "Particularism-Universalism" dimension represents the foundation of interpersonal interactions based on either general rules or personal relationships. Universalism suggests that interactions are guided by universal norms, where behavior patterns remain consistent irrespective of personal characteristics.

Conversely, particularism suggests that interactions are guided by personal ties, resulting in behavior patterns that vary with personal characteristics. Parsons (1951) indicated that through varying orientations of particularism and universalism different cultural regions develop divergent norms of interpersonal interaction (Morris et al., 2008; Trompenaars, 1994).

The Particularism-Universalism dimension holds significant relevance in the context of upward influence. Upward influence is often viewed as a deviant behavior within organizations. Due to this lack of legitimacy, other organizational members may distrust subordinates who attempt to influence their supervisors (Heimer, 1992). Therefore, when subordinates engage in UIT, they must consider the perspectives and preferences of other organizational members. They need to weigh the option of employing formal public methods (universalism) versus private personal approaches (particularism) and determine which method is less likely to cause dissent or dissatisfaction. Additionally, previous studies have found that the particularism–universalism dimension reflects differences across cultures (Chen et al., 2017; Xin & Pearce, 1996), indicating that this dimension can also effectively distinguish UIT derived from different cultural research approaches.

Two-dimensional Categorizing Framework

In this section, we present a two-dimensional categorizing framework comprising Homonomous orientation-Autonomous orientation and Particularism-Universalism. In the first quadrant are UIT that are characterized as autonomous and universal, emphasizing the use of methods compliant with organizational regulations to compel a supervisor to accept one's ideas, such as rational persuasion through theoretical logic and evidence. In the second quadrant are UIT that are characterized as autonomous and particular, emphasizing the use of informal ways to pressure supervisors into accepting one's ideas. These tactics would typically involve directly reporting to higher-level authorities to exert pressure.

In the third quadrant are UIT that are characterized

as homonomous and particular, emphasizing the use of informal ways to satisfy a supervisor's personal needs and change the supervisor's decisions. A typical tactic in this category involves leveraging personal relationships to persuade supervisors to support one's proposals. Finally, in the fourth quadrant are UIT that are characterized as homonomous and universal, emphasizing compliance with organizational rules to meet a supervisor's personal needs and change the supervisor's decisions, such as exchanging the benefit of meeting the supervisor's job-related needs with the benefit of their support.

Method

Questionnaire and Sample

We adopted the methodology proposed by Robinson and Bernett (1995) to examine the proposed categorizing framework. We used a questionnaire survey to assess the similarities between various UIT. To make the questionnaire simple, we include 28 UIT from previous studies. We followed Robinson and Bernett (1995) in adopting a matrix format to compare the similarity of the 28 UIT. We employed a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 9, where 1 represented "not at all similar" and 9 represented "highly similar." To prevent cognitive overload for the respondents, we prepared 28 questionnaires, each presenting only the definition of one specific tactic as the target of comparison, and prompted the respondents to assess the similarity between that tactic and the other 27 tactics based on that definition.

The sample size for each pair of comparisons ranged from 20 to 22 after deductions. A total of 337 subordinates participated our study. After removing invalid questionnaires, we collected 285 questionnaires, resulting in an 84.57% response rate. Our sample consisted of a higher proportion of males (58.16%), with an average age of approximately 30.65 years (*SD* = 6.78). The respondents had an average tenure in their current company of approximately 2.73 years (*SD* = 1.29), and an average tenure under their current supervisor of approximately 1.52 years (*SD* = 1.18).

Analysis

We adopted MDS to analyze our data and examine the proposed two-dimensional categorizing framework. We used principal coordinates analysis (PcoA) to calculate the relative similarity between the different UIT. PcoA has the advantage of efficiently describing the relationships among items using few dimensions. We also adopted the stress index suggested by Jaworska and Chupetlovska-Anastasova (2009) to determine the most appropriate number of dimensions for our data. The stress index gradually decreases as the number of dimensions increases. The optimal number of dimensions for our data was deemed to have been reached when the stress index value showed the greatest decline at the Nth dimension.

Results

Table 2 presents the stress index values for different numbers of dimensions. It can be observed that the stress index reaches 0.38 for a single dimension and drops to 0.28 for two dimensions, a decrease of 0.10. The stress index does not notably decrease further with a subsequent increase in dimensions. Thus, the stress index results suggest that the two-dimensional model is the most suitable, aligning with our expectations.

Figure 1 illustrates the results of the analysis of the two-dimensional framework. Overall, the results from the MDS align with our expectations. Along the horizontal dimension, as the dimension values increase, the UIT depicted on the graph initially fall within the category of informal tactics and personal relationships, such as personal requests, and gradually transition toward compliance with consensus rules, such as rational persuasion. Tactics such as gifts or favors are positioned on the negative side of the horizontal dimension. Conversely, strategies such as written explanations are positioned on the positive side. From this pattern, it can be inferred that the horizontal dimension aligns with the Particularism–Universalism dimension.

As the values on the vertical dimension increase, the UIT plotted on the graph initially fall within the category of considering the supervisor's preference, such as exchange, before gradually transitioning to clear

expression of one's ideas (e.g., rational persuasion), or even forcefully demanding the supervisor's compliance (pressure). We thus propose that the vertical dimension aligns with the Homonomous orientation–Autonomous orientation dimension.

Discussion

Contributions

Our two-dimensional framework has several advantages over past frameworks. First, it comprehensively covers UIT stemming from different cultural research approaches, rendering the classification more representative. Second, our framework exclusively includes tactics applicable to upward situations, enhancing the validity of the framework. Last, by using MDS analysis, we provide researchers with a framework to compare the differences and similarities among UIT.

It is evident that existing UIT research has placed less emphasis on particularistic UIT. Although some researchers have adopted cross-cultural or East Asian research approaches to supplement the list of particularistic UIT, more exploration of this category of UIT is needed.

Finally, previous research has suggested that using a combination of UIT enhances the probability of success (Lee et al., 2016). Future research could therefore apply the two-dimensional framework to explore whether using combinations of UIT from different quadrants is more effective than using single UIT.

Limitations

Our sample mainly contained individuals with relatively short work experience and who were not in managerial positions. Thus, the respondents might have relied solely on the definitions provided by the researchers to assess the similarity between UIT. The external validity of this framework is therefore limited, and future research could address this limitation by testing the framework on samples of experienced workers or managers to improve its external validity.

The absence of samples from cultural regions other

than Taiwan limits the applicability of this framework to other cultures. Future research could examine whether this framework is applicable to other East Asian cultures, or indeed Western cultures.

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