

## **The Moderating Effect of Helping Behavior on the Relationship Between Ingratiation and Supervisor Satisfaction**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the combined effect of ingratiation and helping behavior on supervisor satisfaction in the workplace. Based on a sample of 168 supervisors and 453 employees working in Pakistan's hospitality sector, we find that the effect of ingratiation is insignificant at lower levels of helping behavior. However, the relationship between ingratiation and supervisor satisfaction becomes significant as helping behavior increases. This suggests that a combination of ingratiation and helping tactics is more effective in achieving supervisor satisfaction than relying on a single influence tactic.*

**Keywords:** Helping behavior, influence tactics, ingratiation, supervisor satisfaction, Pakistan.

**JEL classification:** M19.

### **1. Introduction**

Supervisor satisfaction refers to a supervisor's perception of how well an employee performs (Rich, 2008). As a key element of performance appraisal systems (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000), it has received considerable attention in the literature on organizational psychology. However, our knowledge of the social influence mechanisms explaining supervisor satisfaction remains limited. Given the rising importance of social influence tactics such as impression management tactics, it is necessary to explore the social interaction mechanisms used to achieve higher levels of supervisor satisfaction. We attempt to fill this gap by examining what induces employees to use social influence tactics to achieve their desired level of supervisor satisfaction.

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Goffman's (1959) theory of impression management shows that individuals engage in social behaviors to control how others perceive them. An example of this is ingratiation, through which individuals make themselves more attractive to others (Jones, 1964). Ingratiation is distinct from other social influence tactics (and is appropriate to this study) because it is directed upward in the workplace hierarchy (Porter, Allen & Angle, 1981; Ralston, 1985). The literature indicates that employees in the services sector are highly likely to use ingratiation tactics to make a good impression on their supervisors (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Appelbaum & Hughes, 1998).

Some studies show that a combination of impression management tactics is more effective than a single tactic or the absence thereof. Proost et al. (2010) investigate the combined impact of ingratiation and self-promotion on employee evaluations. In a more recent study, Asadullah et al. (2016) examine the indirect effect of ingratiation on supervisor satisfaction through the medium of helping behavior across different levels of ingratiation. The effect of ingratiation on supervisor satisfaction can vary across different levels of helping behavior, which Organ (1988) describes as extra-role behavior that goes beyond an employee's formal job description. It is also an important characteristic of work environments that require a high level of interdependence among team members.

This study extends the findings presented by Proost et al. (2010) and Asadullah et al. (2016) by using the modprobe method to investigate the combined effectiveness of ingratiation and helping behavior on supervisor satisfaction. This entails reproducing the effect of ingratiation and helping behavior on supervisor satisfaction as a part of the moderation mechanism. We also use the modprobe results to compare the combined and separate effects of these variables on supervisor satisfaction. In this context, the study offers a number of valuable managerial implications and directions for future research.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Testing**

This section provides an overview of the literature on each variable, based on which we develop the study's hypotheses.

### ***2.1. Ingratiation Behavior and Supervisor Satisfaction***

Ingratiation is a social influence tactic (Appelbaum & Hughes, 1998) that is directed upward in the workplace hierarchy to control how one is

perceived by one's co-workers and supervisors (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The literature shows that ingratiation has several positive outcomes, including (i) promotability (Sibunruang, Capezio & Restubog, 2014; Thacker & Wayne, 1995), (ii) high performance ratings (Asadullah et al., 2016; Gordon, 1996), (iii) favorable interview evaluations (Proost et al., 2010) and (iv) hiring decisions (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989). This explains why employees ingratiate themselves with their supervisors. However, Thacker and Wayne (1995) argue that ingratiation can also have negative outcomes. This inconsistency in the literature needs to be explored.

We argue that employees engage in ingratiation to meet certain expectations. Under Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, individuals engage in certain behaviors after evaluating their consequences. The balance theory (Wu et al., 2013) and principle of reciprocity (Jones, 1964) show that supervisors uphold a positive approach to balance their relationship with their employees. Integrating these three theories, we argue that employees ingratiate themselves with their supervisors, expecting to gain benefits in the form of a higher salary, promotion or other advantages. Supervisors reciprocate by rating their employees' performance more favorably (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998), thus balancing their social relations with the latter. Ingratiation is also used as an interpersonal influence tactic to induce others to respond favorably to one (Ferris et al., 2007). Based on this discussion, we hypothesize that:

- H1: There is a positive relationship between employee ingratiation and the performance rating assigned by his/her supervisor.

## ***2.2. Helping Behavior and Supervisor Satisfaction***

Helping behavior refers to extra-role behavior that goes beyond an employee's formal job description (Katz, 1964). It is central to modern organizational settings in which cooperation and teamwork are highly valued professional requirements. Employees engage in helping behavior by developing or maintaining a rapport with their colleagues, supervisors and/or customers (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998).

The literature indicates that helping behavior has positive outcomes such as personal development (Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003) and psychological wellbeing (Brown et al., 2003; Sonnentag & Grant, 2012; Glomb et al., 2011). However, there is limited empirical evidence of the effect of helping behavior on supervisor satisfaction. Accordingly, this study investigates the extent to which employees use helping behavior as a

social influence tactic to maintain a favorable relationship with their supervisors and thus achieve a high level of supervisor satisfaction.

Rioux and Penner (2001) and Van Dyne and LePine (1998) find that helping behavior enables employees to create a positive impression on their supervisors, who in turn value this behavior. The leader-member exchange theory holds that those employees who enjoy a close relationship with their immediate supervisor are more likely to be favored in terms of personal and career-related benefits (Liden, Sparrowe & Wayne, 1997; Harris, Kacmar & Witt, 2005). Thus, greater cooperation with a supervisor enhances an employee's self-image (Yun, Takeuchi & Liu, 2007; Podsakoff et al., 2009). Additionally, greater cooperation among coworkers improves the quality of service (Susskind, Kacmar & Borchgrevink, 2007), thereby raising supervisor satisfaction in the form of higher performance ratings.

Although engaging in helping behavior may strengthen an employee's interpersonal relationship with his/her supervisor, not all such employees will necessarily be treated equally in turn (Kim, O'Neil & Cho, 2010). Supervisors are likely to value those employees who exhibit greater helping behavior than their peers. Thus, we hypothesize that:

- H2: There is a positive relationship between the helping behavior of an employee and the performance rating he/she is assigned by the supervisor.

As discussed earlier, ingratiation and helping behavior can have a significant impact on supervisor satisfaction when investigated separately. This study extends the relationship by asking how both variables interact with each other in predicting supervisor satisfaction and if ingratiation is still as effective a predictor at lower levels of helping behavior.

While both ingratiation and helping behavior are classified as soft-influence tactics (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985), the latter – whether it is reactive or proactive – involves an element of exchange. Soft-influence tactics are more effective in situations that do not require an exchange or transaction (Barry & Shapiro, 1992). Eastman (1994) finds that ingratiation alone is not as effective in achieving an employee's objectives vis-à-vis his/her supervisor. Supervisors are more likely to favor ingratiating employees when they also believe that the latter is genuinely interested in helping (Farmer et al., 1997; Broll, Gross & Piliavin, 1974; Greenberg & Frisch, 1972; Nemeth, 1970).

Expectancy theory holds the same argument: individuals evaluate a situation cognitively and then exhibit certain behaviors. This implies that a supervisor will evaluate the motives of an employee who displays both ingratiation and helping behavior simultaneously. Thus, ingratiation will effectively predict supervisor satisfaction only at higher levels of helping behavior. Conversely, it will become an ineffective predictor at lower levels of helping behavior. Based on this discussion, we hypothesize that:

- H3: Helping behavior moderates the relationship between ingratiation and supervisor satisfaction such that the relationship is stronger when employee helping behavior is higher and weaker when helping behavior is lower.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The data for this study was collected from a sample of front-service employees and their immediate supervisors who interact consistently with customers. We employed purposive sampling to obtain responses from key informants. Of an initial sample of 200 supervisors and 550 subordinates, 175 supervisors and 465 subordinates returned their survey questionnaires. After eliminating any incomplete questionnaires, the final sample comprised 168 supervisors and 453 employees drawn from hotels and restaurants in four cities: Multan, Lahore, Islamabad and Bahawalpur.

We asked respondents to consent to the survey in a covering letter that accompanied each questionnaire. Two separate questionnaires were developed for employees and supervisors, the first measuring the level of ingratiation and the second gauging the extent of proactive helping behavior and supervisor satisfaction. A unique code was assigned to each questionnaire to identify and match the supervisor's response to that of his/her employees. The measures used in this study are described below:

- *Ingratiation* is measured using nine items adapted from Kumar and Beyerlein (1991) and Westphal (1998) on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('not at all') to 5 ('to a very large extent'). The overall reliability ( $\alpha$ ) of the scale is 0.85.
- *Supervisor satisfaction* is measured using seven items adapted from Williams and Anderson (1991) on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('not at all') to 5 ('extremely'). The overall reliability ( $\alpha$ ) of the scale is 0.67.

- *Helping behavior* is measured using seven items adapted from Organ and Konovsky (1989) and Smith, Organ and Near (1983) on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('never') to 5 ('very frequently'). The overall reliability ( $\alpha$ ) of the scale is 0.90.
- The *control variables* include gender, age, education level, designation and experience, all of which could potentially affect our results.

#### 4. Analysis and Results

This section provides an initial analysis of the data, followed by the results obtained.

##### 4.1. Preliminary Analysis

Having tested the preliminary assumptions of the data, we carry out a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the latent (independent, dependent and moderating) variables. The results demonstrate an adequate fit (CMIN/DF = 2.14, RMR = 0.079, CFI = 0.953, TLI = 0.945, RMSEA = 0.051). The loadings of the final CFA model are used to examine the convergent validity and discriminant validity of the scales. The values given in Table 1 indicate a satisfactory level of convergent and discriminant validity for all the scales used. The ratio of the chi-squared term to the degrees of freedom is less than 3, verifying the discriminant validity of the scales in line with Carmines and McIver (1981).

**Table 1: Convergent and discriminant validity measures**

Variable	Convergent validity		Discriminant validity	
	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Ingratiation behavior	0.88	0.60	0.13	0.08
Helping behavior	0.90	0.56	0.38	0.26
Supervisor satisfaction	0.51	0.38	0.38	0.21

*Source:* Authors' calculations.

Next, we use the Herman single-factor method (see Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) to assess the common method variance (CMV) by loading all the items on a single factor to carry out an exploratory factor analysis. The results show that 22.5 percent of the variance is explained by a single factor. Since this is less than the 40 percent benchmark, we can assume the data is not subject to CMV (see Podsakoff et al., 2003). We retest for CMV by connecting a common latent factor to the items in the CFA model and

restricting the value of the paths from observed to common latent variables to 1. This model explains 4 percent of the variance in the latent factor, indicating that CMV is absent in the data. Finally, we compute the mean, standard deviation and correlation among the variables used (Table 2).

**Table 2: Mean, standard deviation and correlation**

Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1	1.12	0.344	1.00								
2	2.53	0.806	-0.08	1.00							
3	2.59	1.086	0.16**	0.10*	1.00						
4	1.43	0.656	-0.13**	-0.28**	-0.09	1.00					
5	5.90	0.427	-0.03	-0.12*	-0.27**	0.09	1.00				
6	2.33	1.088	-0.13**	0.46**	0.07	-0.21**	-0.01	1.00			
7	2.03	0.806	0.08	0.26**	0.29**	-0.18**	-0.23**	0.21**	1.000		
8	3.55	1.064	-0.14**	-0.09	-0.13**	0.09*	0.02	-0.11*	-0.050	1.00	
9	3.84	1.045	-0.08	-0.07	-0.13**	0.15**	0.17**	0.04	-0.043	0.32**	1.00
10	3.89	0.715	0.18**	-0.04	0.02	0.05	-0.12*	0.02	0.043	0.32**	0.09

Note: \*\* = correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), \* = correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

SD = standard deviation. 1 = gender, 2 = age, 3 = education, 4 = work arrangement, 5 = job title, 6 = experience, 7 = firm size, 8 = helping behavior, 9 = ingratiation behavior, 10 = supervisor satisfaction.

Source: Authors' calculations.

#### 4.2. Hypothesis Testing

Following Hayes and Matthes (2009), we apply the modprobe syntax in SPSS, introducing employee demographics as control variables, ingratiation as an independent variable, helping behavior as a moderator and supervisor satisfaction as the dependent variable. The statistical output of the modprobe syntax in Table 3 shows that ingratiation has an insignificant effect on supervisor satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.0245$ ;  $t = 0.6815$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). This statistical result does not support H1. However, helping behavior has a significant effect on supervisor satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.2216$ ;  $t = 6.4194$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), thus supporting H2. The results also demonstrate that the interaction term of ingratiation and helping behavior is significant ( $\beta = 0.0688$ ;  $t = 2.1034$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), thereby supporting H3.

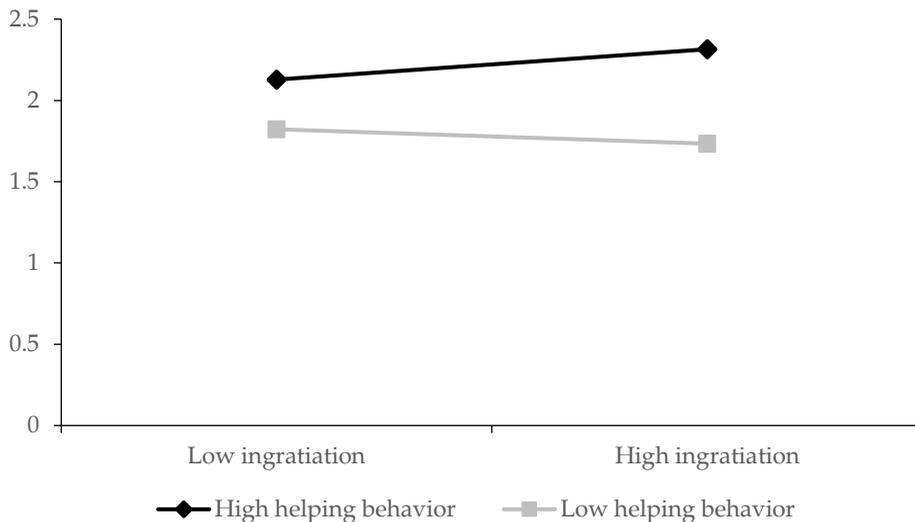
**Table 3: Interaction effect of ingratiation and helping behavior on supervisor satisfaction (modprobe output)**

Variable	$\beta$	SE	t	p
Constant	5.3796	0.5219	10.3073	0.0000
Gender	-0.2911	0.0961	-3.0288	0.0026
Age	-0.0561	0.0457	-1.2273	0.2204
Education	0.0438	0.0315	1.3916	0.1648
Experience	0.0436	0.0338	1.2904	0.1976
Ingratiation	0.0245	0.0359	0.6815	0.4959
Helping behavior	0.2216	0.0345	6.4194	0.0000
Interaction (IB*HB)	0.0688	0.0327	2.1034	0.0360

Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 1 plots the statistical output to illustrate the interaction effect at a value of one standard deviation above the mean (high) and one standard deviation below the mean (low) of helping behavior (see Cohen et al., 2003). The figure shows that the effect of ingratiation on supervisor satisfaction is stronger when helping behavior is high ( $\beta = 0.3683$ ) and weaker ( $\beta = 0.0932$ ) when the latter is low (Table 4). Overall, the results support H2 and H3, but not H1.

**Figure 1: Interaction effect of ingratiation and helping behavior on supervisor satisfaction**



Note: Moderator = helping behavior (high and low).

**Table 4: Conditional effect of focal predictor on moderator variable**

ZHBM	B	SE	t	p	LLCI(b)	ULCI(b)
1	0.0932	0.0548	1.7001	0.0898	-0.0146	0.2010
2	0.1620	0.0828	1.9553	0.0512	-0.0008	0.3248
3	0.2308	0.1134	2.0351	0.0425	0.0079	0.4536
4	0.2995	0.1449	2.0674	0.0393	0.0148	0.5843
5	0.3683	0.1768	2.0831	0.0378	0.0208	0.7158

Note: Model fit:  $R^2 = 0.1532$ ,  $F = 9.6132$ ,  $df1 = 8.000$ ,  $df2 = 425.000$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $n = 434$ . Independent variable = IB, moderator = HB, outcome variable = SSM. Alpha level used for confidence intervals: 0.05,  $N = 453$ .

Source: Authors' calculations.

## 5. Discussion

Our first hypothesis was that ingratiation is positively associated with supervisor satisfaction. The absence of statistical support for this is unexpected and inconsistent with balance theory (Wu et al., 2013) and the principle of reciprocity (Jones, 1964), under which supervisors are expected to favor employees who display ingratiating behavior. However, the finding is consistent with studies such as Farmer et al. (1997), Broll et al. (1974), Greenberg and Frisch (1972) and Nemeth (1970). It implies that supervisors do not necessarily see ingratiation in a positive light and will not favor employees who engage in this behavior.

The second hypothesis proposed that helping behavior is positively related to supervisor satisfaction. Most studies support this idea at the level of individuals, groups and organizations (see Podsakoff, Ahearne & MacKenzie, 1997; Podsakoff et al., 2009). The result is also consistent with MacKenzie, Podsakoff and Fetter (1993) and Organ, Podsakoff and MacKenzie (2006) who note that supervisors favor employees who engage in organizational citizenship behavior. However, some studies argue that extra-role behavior is positively associated with work overload, job stress, work-family conflict (Bolino & Turnley, 2005) and slower career growth (Bergeron, 2007). In response to Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013), who question the outcomes of helping behavior, we provide empirical evidence of its positive association with supervisor satisfaction (a positive outcome).

Proost et al. (2010) and Kacmar, Delery and Ferris (1992) report that self-promotion tactics are more effective than ingratiation. While H1 and H2 support similar findings, the beta coefficient for H1 is very low and insignificant. This indicates that ingratiation is an ineffective means of

achieving supervisor satisfaction. The disparity is due to the different dependent variables used in both studies.

Our third hypothesis investigates the moderating effect of helping behavior on the relationship between ingratiation and supervisor satisfaction. The statistical support for this is in accordance with the expectancy theory, which states that individuals evaluate the outcome of a certain behavior cognitively. In this case, we find that supervisors evaluate employees' performance in terms of their helping behavior over and above ingratiation, which is not correlated with supervisor satisfaction in the absence of helping behavior. The relationship becomes significant when helping behavior (based on social exchanges among coworkers) is high. These findings also support the view that supervisors favor ingratiating employees only when they believe that the latter's helping behavior is genuine (see Farmer et al., 1997; Broll et al., 1974; Greenberg & Frisch, 1972; Nemeth, 1970).

Our results are in line with recent studies such as Sibunruang et al. (2014) and Proost et al. (2010), who find that a combination of influence tactics is more effective. We show that the combined effect of ingratiation and helping behavior is more effective than the individual impact of ingratiation on supervisor satisfaction, but less effective than that of helping behavior on supervisor satisfaction. This distinction arises due to the nature of combinations we investigate. Overall, we conclude that ingratiation when combined with other influence tactics is more effective than when it is employed alone.

## **6. Further Research and Practical Implications**

This study offers several key directions for future research. The first is to replicate the study in different settings and investigate the individual as well as the interaction effect of influence tactics. The second is to extend the current study by examining the effectiveness of ingratiation by introducing the perceived intentions of the individual engaging in this behavior and his/her target. Third, we show that ingratiation is ineffective in the absence of helping behavior in terms of its effect on supervisor satisfaction. This result is different from that of previous studies due to the difference in dependent variables used. Accordingly, one could investigate the effect of ingratiation on other variables such as the gains accruing to the individual employee or to a group. Here, we have described helping behavior as a social influence tactic, but this could be extended by investigating the interaction between hard-influence and soft-influence tactics.

The study's results provide further insight into the value of ingratiation and helping behavior from an employee's point of view, suggesting that a combination of soft-influence tactics is more likely to achieve supervisor satisfaction than a single social-influence strategy. This is important because the outcome of ingratiation alone may not be what employees expect, leading them to waste time and energy on creating a certain impression and affecting their perceptions of organizational justice and the psychological contract.

Finally, our findings suggest that employees and their supervisors can be recruited, trained and evaluated based on those social interaction mechanisms that enable them to effectively evaluate and respond to soft social influence tactics. This implies that training sessions focusing on this aspect may be useful both for employees and supervisors.

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