An exploration of influence tactics used by nurse managers in daily work and the contribution to Excellent Care: a case study.

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Samenvatting.

Titel: een verkenning van het gebruik van beïnvloedingstactieken door verpleegkundig leidinggevenden in hun dagelijks werk en de bijdrage aan Excellente Zorg: een case studie.

Inleiding: Om het verpleegkundig beroep toekomstbestendig te maken, is het programma Excellente Zorg van start gegaan, waarin een belangrijke voor de leidinggevende is weggelegd in het creëren van een stimulerende werkomgeving om verpleegkundigen optimaal te laten functioneren. Het beïnvloeden van collega' s is de kern van leidinggeven waarbij de gebruikte beïnvloedingstactieken voor een belangrijk deel bepalen hoe effectief de beïnvloedingspoging is.

Doel en onderzoeksvraag: Het doel van deze studie is meer kennis te verkrijgen over de wijze waarop verpleegkundig leidinggevenden collega' s beïnvloeden en in hoeverre dit bijdraagt aan de uitgangspunten van Excellente Zorg. De onderzoeksvragen luiden als volgt: Welke beïnvloedingstactieken gebruiken verpleegkundig leidinggevenden in hun dagelijks werk? Hoe draagt de wijze van beïnvloeden bij aan Excellente Zorg?

Methode: Zes leidinggevenden van een thuiszorgorganisatie die werkt volgens de principes van Excellente Zorg, werden twee werkdagen geschaduwd om gebruikte beïnvloedingstactieken en de context hiervan te onderzoeken.

Resultaten: De leidinggevenden gebruikten een variatie van beïnvloedingstactieken, waarbij een gemeenschappelijk patroon te herkennen was. De meest gebruikte tactieken waren overtuigen, consulteren, legitimeren en vleien. De minst gebruikte tactieken waren ruilen, coalitievorming en persoonlijk appèl. Inspireren werd matig gebruikt.

Conclusie: Overtuigen, consulteren en vleien zijn passende tactieken om betrokken en gemotiveerde medewerkers te bewerkstelligen. Legitimering draagt niet bij aan een stimulerende omgeving. Inspireren door een beroep te doen op gezamenlijke waarden en visie levert een zeer belangrijke bijdrage aan excellente Zorg door het creëren van langdurige betrokkenheid en motivatie van verpleegkundigen.

Aanbevelingen: Indien verpleegkundig leidinggevenden meer inspireren en minder legitimering zouden gebruiken, zouden zij een grotere bijdrage leveren aan een stimulerende omgeving om bij te dragen aan het bewerkstelligen van gemotiveerde zelfstandige verpleegkundige teams en Excellente Zorg tot zijn recht laten komen.

Trefwoorden: verpleegkundigen, leidinggevenden, Excellente Zorg, beïnvloedingstactieken

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Abstract

Title: An exploration of influence tactics used by nurse managers in daily work and its contribution to Excellent Care: a case study.

Background: In preparing nurses for the future, a program called Excellent Care was launched in which nurse managers play an important role in creating a supportive and stimulating environment for nurses to function optimally. A key part of a managers role is to influence others including the use of influence tactics. Little is known how nurse managers influence co-workers in daily work and how this concurs to Excellent Care by contributing to a stimulating environment.

Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to describe which influence tactics nurse managers use and how this contributes to Excellent Care. Which influence tactics do nurse managers use of a home care organization adhering to the principles of Excellent Care? How does the way of exerting influence contribute to Excellent Care?

Methods

Six nurse managers were shadowed each for two working days to observe which influence tactics were used and the context of exerting influence.

Results

Nurse managers used a variety of influence tactics. Regularities showed frequent use of rational persuasion, consultation, legitimating and ingratiation. Least used tactics were exchange, coalition and personal persuasion. Inspirational appeals were moderately used.

Conclusion

Using rational persuasion, consultation and ingratiation contributes to a stimulating environment. Legitimating does not stimulate commitment of co-workers, while appealing to shared values and visions is an essential component of Excellent Care.

Recommendations

If nurse managers use more often inspirational appeals and less legitimating, the way they exert influence will contribute to a large extent to a stimulating environment and to the maturation of Excellent Care.

keywords: nurse managers, influence tactics, Excellent Care, case study

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INTRODUCTION.

The public debate about nurses' practices and profession has intensified in the last few years, due to changes in society and health-care. The efforts undertaken to restrict the increasing costs of the persistent growing health-care, the desire to improve the quality of health-care and the expecting shortage of qualified nurses, have led to a new reflection on the profession[1,2]. The emphasis, pace and the fierce of the discourse has recently changed. Currently the debate focuses on the future and empowerment of nurses[3,4].

As a result of this debate, a program called Excellent Care (EC) is launched in the Netherlands by the professional nursing association in collaboration with the Dutch government[5]. This program is inspired by the Magnet Recognition Program from the United States[6]. The base of this program is achieving excellent patient care through a better positioning of nurses and a more attractive work environment, which eventually will lead to better patient outcomes. Simultaneously, a new profile of the nurse profession is composed in the Netherlands as an answer to the changing demands of health care and society[7]. In this profile as well as in EC, a stimulating work environment is crucial in achieving a better positioning (autonomy) and fulfilling of the roles and tasks of the professional nurse.

One of the conditions that characterize a stimulating work environment is the support of the nurse manager (NM). Research underlines the pivotal role NM"s have in creating a work environment that supports nursing excellence[8,9]. Numerous studies confirmed the influence of the nurse leader on both nurse and patient satisfaction[10-14]. A general conclusion of research regarding successfully leading healthy workplaces, is the statement that transformational leadership is effective in creating stimulating and supporting work environments[3,15,16]. Transformational leadership (TL) is a core component of the Magnet Recognition Program[17]. TL is described as a process by which leaders raise the aspirations and motivations of others to higher levels by appealing to higher ideals and values[18]. Transformational managers inspire a shared vision, empower others, challenge the process, encourage the hart, enable others to act and leading the organization forwards[19]. Despite the wealth of research concerning TL, there is not much research in this topic concerning exerting influence as key part of executives role.

The essence of leadership is influence: to be effective as a leader it is necessary to influence people[20]. Influencing people is a complex phenomenon which comprises personal traits and skills and the position, behavior and the relation of the persons involved[21-24]. The type of behavior used intentionally to influence the attitudes and behavior of another person is called

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an influence tactic[20]. The success to influence others depends to a great extent on the used influence tactics[25-27]. Moreover influence tactics have an impact on the relationships and behavior that contributes to organizational effectiveness[28,29].

Despite the quantity of published literature, many questions about the way managers influence people remain unanswered. This is perhaps also caused by limitations of restricted methods of data collection in previous research. Most research involved questionnaires about frequencies of used tactics[30,31], resulting in disconnecting used tactics from the context. Exerting influence is highly contextualized[32], but to our knowledge there is no field research to observe which influence tactics were actually used by NM's in daily work. Withal research to date has focused on NM' s working in hospitals, which have a more hierarchic structure. There is a paucity of research on NM's in other health care settings like home care, while long-term care is rapidly growing[33]. Used influence tactics by NM's in the expanding home care, have considerable impact on achieving effective and efficient care. Hitherto both the obvious and the more subtle used tactics are not studied as component of daily work and how this contributes to the supportive role of the NM as part of the stimulating work environment in EC.

Problem Statement.
Despite the acknowledgement of the pivotal role of NM's in creating a stimulating work environment for nurses, there is a deficiency in research that observed how NM's exert influence, which is the essential, but complex part of a managers' role and how this concurs with EC.

Aim.
The aim of this study was to examine which and how influence tactics NM's use in daily work to influence co-workers (subordinates, peers and bosses) and the extent of its contribution to the stimulating role of the NM in EC. The findings of this study can help improve NM's behavior and to the maturation of EC.

OBJECTIVES
Primary Objective:
The purpose of this study was to describe which influence tactics nurse managers use in daily work in a home care organization adhering to the principles of EC.
The secondary purpose was to examine how the way NM's exert influence contributes to the principles of EC.

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The research questions were stated as follow:

Which influence tactics do nurse managers use in a home care organization adhering to the principles of EC?

How does the way NM's exert influence contributes to the principles of a stimulating and supporting environment as mend in EC?

METHODS

Design.

The research approach was established within the Managerial Work and Behavior approach (MWB)[34]. MWB is a distinct approach to understand managerial work by analyzing the day-to-day behavior of individual managers[35]. Within MWB we used shadowing as a methodological approach to capture actual behavior and opinions both, to examine participants in a holistic way[36]. Shadowing is a profoundly suitable and frequently used technique within MBA to investigate the nature of the managerial work: it views behavior directly and gives the researcher access to both the trivial and mundane[36]. This is congruent with Hutchinson's suggestion: "Rather than continuing to measure leader self-reports and followers reported perceptions of leadership characteristics, it may be more fruitful for future research to consider assessing the extent of actual leadership behaviors rather than continuing to focus upon perceptions of leadership"[37]. The use of actual used influence tactics was studied using a case study, which is a traditional approach for research in organizations focusing on the complex relations of individuals in a natural setting[38]. We agree with Yin that the all-encompassing feature of a case study is its intense focus on a single phenomenon within its real-life context[39].

Participants.

NM's were considered to be eligible for this study if they were frontline managers who supervise staff nurses and were responsible for the management of nursing teams and did not take part of nursing practices. NM's were recruited from one large home care organization in the Netherlands (a convenience sample) which adheres to the principles of EC for the last three years. NM's were informed and invited to participate the study by a contact person from the organization or via their supervisor. Additionally a letter with more detailed information from the first author (MZ) was send to willingly persons.

The use of influence tactics depends on social norms of organizations[40,41] and on personal characteristics[22]. Since we were looking for commonalities that showed representation of the social norms of the organization, we aimed to include a variety of NM's. The study started by shadowing three NM's and when the study progressed, participants were recruited by using a

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by snowballing technique[42]. All participants were registered nurses and had worked as a nurse.

Data collection.

Shadowing is a research technique to closely follow the participants wherever they go during a full work day[36]. Shadowing generates rich, contextually sensitive data through direct observation of informants in their natural setting[36]. Each NM was shadowed for two work days with normal day routine and activities by the same researcher (MZ). During the observations an almost continuous set of field notes was written with a Livescribe™ Pulse™ Smartpen enabling to store hand written field notes digitally on the pen and then upload it to a computer. It also made it possible to digitally store audio fragments of dialog. During breaks, translocation or at the end of the working day, additional questions were asked to clarify purposes of conversations and interactive member checks took place. Memos were written during the process of shadowing with reflections of the researcher.

Ethical considerations.

To avoid performance bias (observer- effect) participants were informed that behavior was observed, but were not informed about the focus on influence behaviors. All NM's participated voluntary in the study and written informed consent was obtained. Before meetings with co-workers the researcher was introduced and co-workers were asked for approval of the presence of the researcher. Only three times the researchers presence was not permitted; twice because of the personal subject of the conversation and once the reason was not clear. All data were handled anonymous and the identity of the organization and the NM's were only known to the researchers.

Analysis.

Analysis of the findings was a hybrid approach[43]. Findings were deductively analyzed using the influence tactics as described by Yukl (table 1) in the Influence Behavior Questionnaire (IBQ). This classification is widely used and is suitable for ranking influence tactics in downwards, upwards and lateral directions. Influence behavior was inductively analyzed using the components of TL[17] (table 2) as a template or a conceptual framework to organize and illuminate the observations and data[44]. The first author (MZ) searched for patterns within cases, which was reviewed by the second author (PL). As the iterative process of data collection and analysis progressed, cross-case analysis guided the inductive process of the empirical findings.

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Trustworthiness.

To enhance the methodological quality of the study, each manager was shadowed for two days in one week to reduce observer-effect and to prolong engagement to gain trust. Analysis of the data of the first participants determined further participant recruitment in order to obtain variation[45]. Audio-taping (parts) of conversations and giving examples of coding of empirical data enhanced credibility. Triangulation of data collection by asking participants about observed actions, conversations and the way they exerted influence strengthened the conformability. The researcher was not familiar with the participating organization, but had worked in home care as a nurse and as a NM, which established rapport. Observations had intervals of several weeks to build in some periods of social 'downtime' within the research schedule in order to keep an intellectual distance to carry out the processes of analyzing and writing the materials as they are generated in the field[46].

Results

In the months of January until April of 2013, six NM's were shadowed each for two full working days. Participants were between 30 and 46 years old and had experience as a NM between 2,5 and 5 years. They worked three or four days a week and their span of control was 37 to 46 people. Findings are presented by describing used influence tactics and are linked to the components of TL in the context of every day work.

NM' s used most frequently rational persuasion and consultation, followed by legitimating and ingratiation. Exchange, coalition and personal appeals were least used to exert influence (table 3, figure 1). NM's exerted influence mostly during dyadic with subordinates although they spend a lot of their time in the presence of peers. Influencing co-workers involved (registration of) working schedules, presence at meetings, staff ups and downs, increasing financial results, collaboration with co-workers, rehabilitation after absenteeism, protocols and use of computer (systems). Nursing practice or patients were rarely subject of discussion. Rational persuasion, consultation and collaboration were used to stimulate subordinates' independence.

Participant A: " And so you are going to talk about that. You have to talk about who determines time specifies. That's what the conversation should be about".
Participant C: 'You have to see for yourself if you will have this conversation alone with her or you can ask me to join. I am present here this afternoon".

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Legitimating was a commonly used tactic and used in different situations as illustrated in the following exemplars:

Participant D: " I had send you a mail in which I told you that I want your registration by Thursday and that was already too late, because I have to approve your hours on Wednesday, so this is a serious problem"'.
Participant B: "You have to use this checklist. This is important. If we get an audit, this will costs us 4 hundred grand".
Participant A reacted on complains from nurses that one colleague (A.) made some mistakes: "A . works sometimes 11 days in a row. I don't want that and she should not according to the working hours act".

Inspirational appeals were not used very often and concerning more often values and standards about cooperation or division of tasks than providing good care or visions about the future, work-fulfillment or achieving organizational objectives.

Participant C: "A vocation should not be achieved that easily. Because soon you get someone of whom I think.. . Imagine that I have doubts about you, then I would rather have a conversation with you than that I think she has to do it (taking care of patients) on her own.
Participant A; " You are a district nurse and it's increasingly important to be accessible all day long and to be the linchpin in this".

Ingratiation was used often in dyads to support one's self-confidence or to enhance a good relation.

Participant E: "You said yourself I am straightforward, you say everything how you feel about it. I have to say I appreciate that, because I know exactly where you're coming from".
Participant A: "You made up your mind. You have all kinds of ideas and you know what you want with every discipline".

Rational persuasion and consultation were mostly used influence tactics with peers. In meetings with peers, NM's sought for consensus in decision making, suggested possible answers when asked for opinions or past experiences. Often used phrases were: Did you think about…? Maybe you can do….. What I would do is… Perhaps it is good to…Some NM's mentioned afterwards they had an ace up their sleeves, because they were unsure about reactions of peers. In case there was a meeting with their boss, NM's in general had a cautious attitude and were more reactive than active in influencing co-workers.
 NM's invested in good relationships with co-workers by talking about personal issues, reacting empathic and understanding, supporting in solving problems, stressing agreement, and being approachable and trustworthy. In case of sick-leave, efforts were made to outreach to the absent team-members. In decision-making subordinates' interests were manifest to

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NM's as illustrated by the following quote from participant B who had to make the decision not to prolong employment of one nurse:

In business terms ok, but for her personally so sad. It gives me mulligrubs. Seriously shitty".

The difficulty to address inappropriate or undesired behavior or to dig deeper than superficial answers was referred by several NM's. In considerable occasions NM's did not try to influence or address undesirable behavior or opinions, because they considered this as a harm for a good relation with co-workers. NM"s schedules were hectic and interruptive in general and preparation before and reflection after meetings or dyads were compromised. Only in a mere case NM's had initiated to start regular peer reviews a few months before the study. Generally, Nm's had a wait and see attitude and lack initiatives towards issues at macro-level but reacted more on daily events. NM's encouraged co-workers to take part of problem-solving and achieving organizational goals by using consultation, but when they did not succeed in involving co-workers, their repertoire of stimulating co-workers was restricted.

Discussion.

The findings of this study showed that although NM's showed a personal pattern in influence behavior, there were regularities in influence behavior. NM's had a preference for rational persuasion and consultation, followed by legitimating and ingratiation. Interestingly NM's used not many inspirational appeals, while this is one of the core influence tactics[47]. Besides the display of values and vision is a substantial element of EC[17]. Establishing good relationships and using rational persuasion, consultation and ingratiation supported the components of TL. The extensive use of ingratiation did not contribute to the components of TL nor is this tactic effective in changing behavior or values[26].

The success of exerting influence depends on the outcome of an influence attempt, which can be commitment, compliance or resistance[26]. Commitment, an internally agreement with organization objectives, is required in EC where high levels of motivation and empowering leading towards autonomy of nursing staff[48]. Transformational practices encourage organizational commitment[49]. Consultation, inspirational appeals and rational persuasion (core tactics) are related to commitment, whereby the use of hard tactics (pressure, legitimating, coalition) is more related to resistance[26] and appears to question employee motivation and competence[50].

The parsimoniously inspirational appeal.

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The findings of used influence tactics are partly consistent with other research of used influence tactics by NM's[23,51,52]. A recent study of leadership in hospitals showed that leaders used most often consultation and rational persuasion followed by inspirational appeals, legitimating and collaboration. This is mostly congruent with our results, except that in this present study NM's used few inspirational appeals to influence their co-workers. An auxiliary study demonstrated that distance to clinical practices generated the absence of initiatives towards upgrading and motivation of nursing practices and to a reactive role for NM's in hospitals[53]. Nm's in home care do not take part of nursing practice, nor do they see patients. The display of a reactive role was also found in other studies[55,56]. The NM's were passive in their dissemination of risk management strategies and facilitating evidence based practice, rather than proactively "promoting and helping them forward" as may be expected in managerial behavior. Because inspirational appeals are derived from values and visions, NM's had to transcend the day-to-day operations and events and focus more on achieving goals in the future in order to use inspirational appeals. NM' s were more reacting on incidents that already happened and were running from one event to the other without much time for preparation or reflection. Research showed that effective influence needed planning, preparation and target assessment to choose the appropriate tactic[54]. A study towards change in use of influence tactics during a transition to self-directed work teams, indicated that specifically high self-monitoring managers increased their usage of core influence tactics and decreased their use of hard tactics[57].

The ubiquitous legitimating.

Perhaps the circumstances also counted for the widespread use of legitimating, because in those months NM's had to take accountability for improvement of the financial situation. Moreover in the months before the study, an external audit was conducted to obtain a national accreditation. This audit exists of nine headings, of which only one concerns the care performance and the other eight concerning conditions for the organization. NM's had to ensure this accreditation was obtained and therefore were engaged with mainly organizational conditions. Relying on rules and protocols does not contribute to challenging the norm or encourage creativity. The use of hard tactics rouses suspicions about the manager's concern for subordinates interests and raises questions regarding competence and motivation[50].

To appreciate the findings of this study, a few aspects should be reflected on. Unlike questionnaires or diary methods, shadowing is a solid method to capture the overt and the more subtleties of exerting influence in daily work. All participants reported the observers'

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presence did not affected their behavior, although the probing had challenged to question their own practice in some instances. Using the IBQ was helpful to code the influence tactics, but it was not always an unelaborated method. In many occasions NM's said words like good or fine. To be counted for ingratiation, NM' s had to use more than one word. Another reflection is needed for the sample of this study. Only NM's who presented themselves to participate in this study were included. It is conceivable that a particular type of persons were presented and selection bias was at issue.

Conclusion.

Observations of two average days of six different NM's in home care gave valuable insight in the actually use of influence tactics by NM' s in daily work. The use of inspirational appeals, consultation, rational appeals and ingratiation are most important tactics in EC in accomplishing sustainable committed, involved and motivated nurses. The ample use of legitimating does not contribute to EC, because it is related to resistance and does not show faith in employees' competence and motivation. This study showed NM's can make a more significant contribution to a stimulating environment for autonomous nurses in home care by reducing legitimating and augmenting inspirational appeals.

Recommendations.

If organizations will embrace EC and EC will reach maturity, NM's have to articulate more often visions and values of good nursing practice to stimulate and inspire nursing staff. Inspirational appeals are a major contributor to guide an autonomous nursing team, while the use of legitimating is counterproductive to a stimulating and supportive role of a NM.
Our findings suggest that NM's influence behavior can be improved by more preparation and reflection on their own behavior. Further field research in home care will enlarge the knowledge of this particular field of health-care.

Table 1. Definition of the 11 proactive influence tactics	
Rational persuasion	The agent uses logical arguments and factual evidence to show that a request or proposal is feasible and relevant for important task objectives.
Consultation	The agent asks the target person to suggest improvements or help plan a proposed activity or change for which the target person's support is desired.
Inspirational appeals	The agent appeals to the target's values and ideals or seeks to arouse the target person's emotions to gain commitment for a request or proposal.
Collaboration	The agent offers to provide assistance or necessary resources if the target will carry out a request or approve a proposed change.
Apprising	The agent explains how carrying out a request or supporting a proposal will benefit the target personally or help to advance the target's career.
Ingratiation	The agent uses praise and flattery before or during an attempt to influence the target person to carry out a request or support a proposal.
Personal appeals	The agent asks the target to carry out a request or support a proposal out of friendship, or asks for a personal favor before saying what it is.
Exchange	The agent offers something the target person wants, or offers to reciprocate at a later time, if the target will do what the agent requests.
Legitimating	The agent seeks to establish the legitimacy of a request or to verify that he/she has the authority to make it.
Pressure	The agent uses demands, threats, frequent checking, or persistent reminders to influence the target to do something.
Coalition tactics	The agent enlists the aid of others, or uses the support of others, as a way to influence the target to do something.
Yukl, 2008	

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Table 2. Components and Attributes of Transformational Leadership

| Components of a transformational leadership style	Attributes and behaviors exhibited by leaders
Idealized influence	■ Followers identify with their leaders Leaders ■ are admired, respected, and trusted ■ display charisma ■ are empathetic and supportive ■ serve as mentors and role models ■ provide a clear set of values and a collective sense of mission
Inspirational motivation	Leaders ■ motivate through enthusiasm and challenge ■ clearly articulate a vision ■ encourage the evolution of individual and team spirit ■ clearly support goal achievement
Intellectual stimulation	Leaders ■ challenge the norm ■ encourage creativity ■ encourage team participation in decision making and problem solving
Individual consideration	Leaders ■ attend to the individual needs of staff members ■ express appreciation for individual and team member contributions ■ support a climate conducive to personal and professional growth ■ enhance individual team member self-fulfillment and worth

Schwarz, 2011

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Table 3. used influence tactics by NM's

Influence tactics	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E	Participant F	total
Rational persuasion	s15 p7 b3	s19 p5	s17 p3 b1	s18 p6	s8 p6	s20 p5 b3	s97 p32 b7
exchange	s2	s2	s1	s2		s3	s10
Inspirational appeal	s9 p4 b2	s5 p3	s1	s10	s8	s8	s41 p7 b2
legitimating	s17 p4	s17 p5 b1	s10	s15 p1 b1	s5 p1	s14 p2	s78 p13 b2
apprising	s3	s4	s5 b1	s5	s2 p1	s5	s24 b2
pressure	s4 p1	s8	s9	s6	s3	s6	s36 p1
collaboration	s6	s8 p1	s10	s12 p2	s2 p2	s11	s49 p5
ingratiation	s15 p4	s4 p3	s4 p1	s11	s7 p4	s6	s47 p12
consultation	s11 p5	s15 p5	s10 p1	s17 p3	s10 p6	s16 p7 b3	s79 p27 b3
personal appeal	s3	s1	s3	s2	p1		s9 p1
coalition	p1 b1			s1		p1	s1p2 b1

s, subordinate ; p, peer ; b, boss

Figure 1. division of used influence tactics

Figure 1. division of used influence tactics
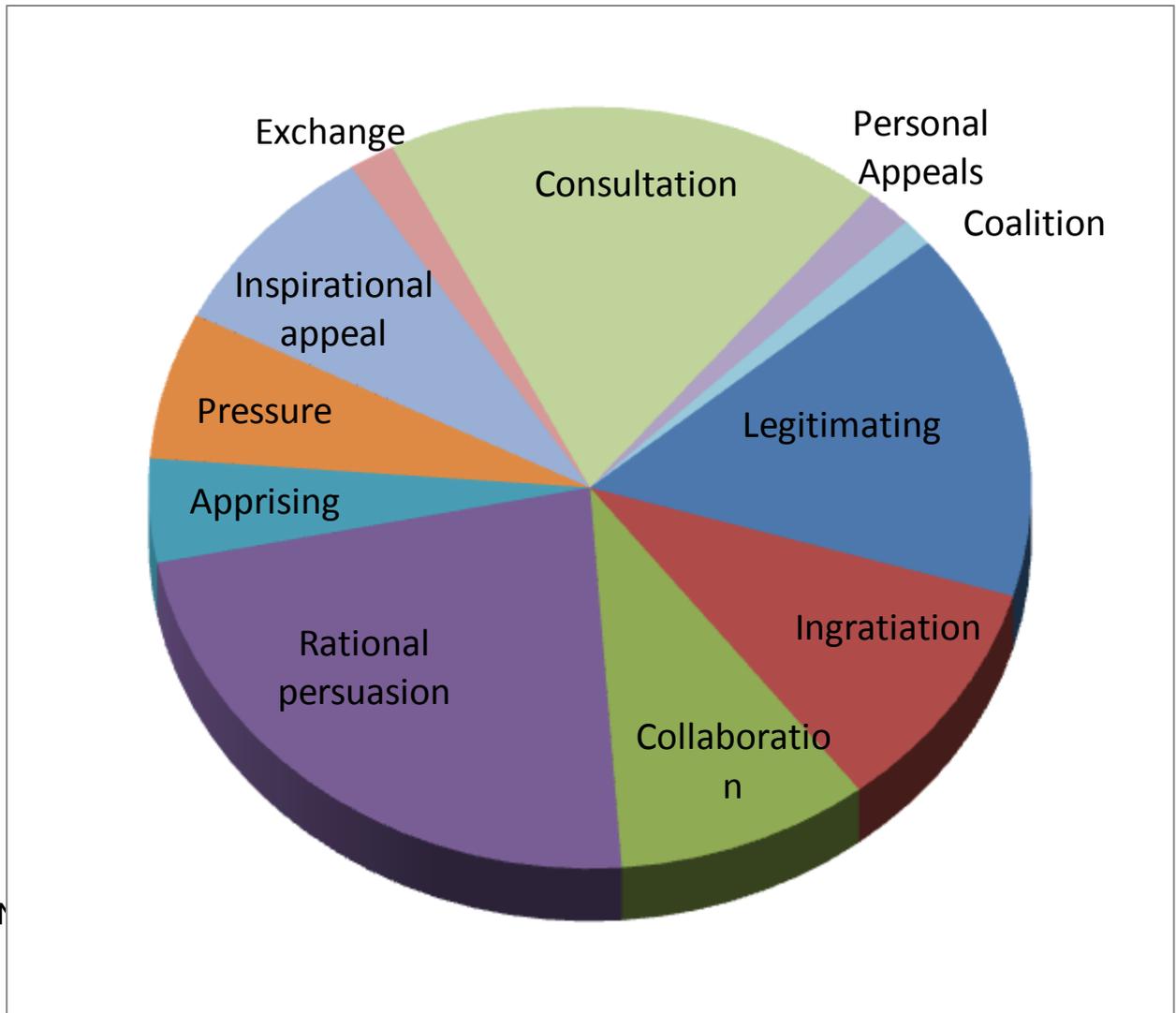
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