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### **Upward Advice Transmission to Leaders in Organizations: Review and Conceptual Analysis**

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Running head: UPWARD ADVICE TRANSMISSION

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Review and Conceptual Analysis

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### Abstract

Advice is often given by individuals who have greater experience, expertise, and wisdom, in order to help someone with less experience, expertise, or wisdom in decision making and problem solving. In many cases, the advisor also possesses formal authority, power, and position. In these cases, advice flows downwards from those with greater formal authority to those with less formal authority. In this paper, the opposite phenomenon is explored: upward advice transmission. The study of the flow of advice from a person with less formal authority to a person with greater formal authority—for example, a formal leader in an organization—provides an important new perspective on advice, particularly for those interested in empowerment in organizations. This paper reviews the empirical and theoretical literature addressing advice transmission and examines advice transmission in the context of formal hierarchical relationships. It then identifies and describes the key variables which research in related literatures suggests might be profitably studied to enhance the research and practical understanding of upward advice transmission in organizations. Variables in five categories—characteristics of the leader, characteristics of the follower, characteristics of the leader-follower relationship, characteristics of the advice, and organizational structural characteristics of the leader-follower relationship—are considered. Directions for research and applications to practice are discussed.

Upward Advice Transmission to Leaders in Organizations:  
Review and Conceptual Analysis

The giving of advice is important all through organizational life. Advisors give advice because their opinions and recommendations are considered to be worthy of consideration (Yaniv, 2004) or because they possess personal resources or characteristics that are helpful to the person in need of advice (e.g., Parker, Good, & Vermillion, 1976; Somervill, Barrios, Fleming, Reiher, & Fish, 1982). The advisor can fill in missing information, help to assess alternative options, or serve as a “sounding board” (Yaniv, 2004). Taking other people’s advice enhances one’s understanding of a problem and may lead to positive outcomes (e.g. Yaniv, 2004; Fleming, Mundt, French, Manwell, Stauffacher, & Barry, 2002; Murr, Miller, & Papadakis, 2002). The topics on which advice is given in organizations include career planning (e.g. Daley, 1996), negotiation, and how to get along and get ahead in the organization. Advice is one of the key benefits organizational mentors provide to their protégées (Nemanick, 2000) (1).

In many cases, advice flows downwards from those with more formal authority in the organization to those with less. The general direction of advice flow holds for leadership in organizations; advice transmission from leaders to followers is common (e.g. McAller, 2003). Equally worthy of study, though often overlooked in research, is advice that flows upwards from those with less formal authority to those with more. The study of upward advice transmission in organizations provides an important new perspective on advice, particularly for researchers and practitioners interested in empowerment in organizations (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Upward advice transmission is particularly important for transformational leaders, who are characterized as offering

subordinates support, encouragement, and advice, but who are also characterized as treating subordinates as equals and engaging in reciprocal relationships with followers (Burns, 1978). This highlights the role that upward advice transmission plays—and might play—in organizational life and in leader/follower interactions.

Because we are interested in the flow of advice across the hierarchy, in this analysis “leader” refers to one with “formal” or “official” authority in an organization (Weber 1978). While such leaders may also be charismatic leaders (Weber, 1978; Bass, 1985), transformational leaders (Burns, 1978), and/or communal leaders (Eagly & Schmidt, 2001), and while leaders may be charismatic, transformational, and/or communal leaders without occupying positions of formal authority, we focus our consideration on leaders with formal and official authority within an organizational hierarchy. The principal question analyzed here, of advice flowing “up” an organizational hierarchy, would not make sense in the absence of an organizational hierarchy. The intersection of formal authority and other aspects of leadership, with respect to upward advice transmission, is considered where appropriate.

Examination of the literature reveals little attention paid to advice flowing upward from followers to leaders. Upward influence tactics have been studied as impression management strategies, efforts to ingratiate oneself to the leader (Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Dockery & Steiner, 1990; Waldron, 1991).

The empirical literature on advice has focused on *what* advice is transmitted and the *outcomes* of using such advice (e.g. Tan & Klimach, 2004; McDowell, Parke, & Wang, 2003; Cherry, 1974). Despite frequent references in both lay and academic contexts, empirical studies on the *nature* of advice as a type of message and *how* such

messages are transmitted have received less attention. In addition, the relationship between advisors and advisees has received scant attention.

In this article, we advance the understanding of upward advice transmission in organizations by (a) reviewing current literature on advice, specifically its nature and transmission; (b) examining advice transmission in the context of formal hierarchical relationships and structures; (c) focusing on the *upward* transmission of advice from those lower in the hierarchy to those higher; (d) identifying key variables in the study of upward advice transmission; and (e) identifying directions for future research.

### **Defining Upward Advice**

Although advice is a common phenomenon, what constitutes advice appears to vary depending on the individual's perception and interpretation of the message. This is reflected in the ways in which empirical studies have operationalized advice differently. Goldsmith and MacGeorge (2000) loosely defined advice as a response to someone with a problem. Koestner et al (1999) defined advice as "expert recommendations" in his comparison of how individuals use advice and how they use objective information. Smith and Goodnow (1999) coupled advice with general support in their study of the elderly's experience of receiving advice. In studies examining advice from parents to their adolescent children (Greene & Grimsley, 1990; Barber, 1994; Tucker, Barber, & Eccles, 2001; McDowell, Parke, & Wang, 2003), one of the domains in which advice is most commonly studied, advice is not concretely operationalized. Instead it appears to be an umbrella term for the parents' sharing of information, whether objective facts or subjective opinion, with adolescents. The variations in how advice is operationalized and conceptualized in these empirical studies suggests that it is currently approached as a

high-level construct with parameters that have not been clearly defined; the construct is therefore subject to interpretation and differences in research findings.

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1983), advice is an “opinion about what could or should be done about a situation or problem” or “counsel.” Advice is not objective information; it is a prescriptive message.

We recommend a research definition of advice as close to its everyday definition as possible, specifying that a message is considered to be advice when it (1) communicates an opinion, not simply a piece of objective information or fact; (2) clearly addresses a problem or issue; and (3) presents a solution in an intentional, normative manner. Upward advice transmission, then, is defined as the communication, by someone with less formal authority to someone with more, of an opinion on how to solve a particular problem or resolve an issue.

This definition has two major strengths. First, it provides clear guidelines for researchers to identify an advice message. Second, it is message-oriented. Rather than identifying advice as a message given by an expert to a non-expert, our definition examines only the message itself. When advice is given by someone not publicly viewed as an expert, a message-oriented definition of advice is more likely to identify the advice message than a relationship- or role-oriented definition.

Upward advice transmission is distinct from upward communication, a topic of interest to organizational researchers. Upward communication is a more general conveying upward of important information regarding work and personal problems, feedback, suggestions for improvement, and subordinate attitudes (Poole, 1995).

Research finds that most organizations have difficulty encouraging upward communication (Poole, 1995).

### **Previous Studies of Advice Transmission**

The transmission of advice has been little studied, although it is clear that, in the context of the organization, with its multiplicity of interpersonal, social, and structural dynamics, studies of informational and social benefits would be well served by a straightforward examination of advice transmission in relation to the formal relational hierarchies.

Research in advice transmission has addressed the topic from three perspectives: the effects of personality variables within the individual (e.g. Koestner et al., 1999), the interaction between two individuals (e.g. MacGeorge, Lichtman, & Pressey, 2002), and the context of social networks (Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2001).

Differences in personality affect advice-taking behavior. Koestner et al. (1999) examined the effects of personality differences in the individual's tendency towards reactive versus reflective autonomy on the likelihood of accepting advice from experts. Reflective autonomy was related to accepting advice, particularly when the experts were credible, but not related to acceptance when the expert was not credible. They also found reactive autonomy to be negatively related to accepting advice from credible experts, especially when it was clear that the advice would contribute to the success of the person receiving it.

The relational dynamic between two individuals has also been found to affect the giving and receiving of advice. Goldsmith and MacGeorge (2000) examined the effects of the power and closeness of a dyadic relationship, as well as the use of politeness



strategies, on how advice is delivered and on its effectiveness. Interestingly, they found that neither advisor-receiver relationship nor politeness strategies were consistently related to perceived advice effectiveness, suggesting that conditions outside of the individual interaction may have stronger influences on advising behavior than the dyadic relationship alone. The individual dyadic relationship appears to have less influence over advice transmission than would be expected, given that advising relationships are often dyadic. In this case, the two individuals were not obligated to any relational dynamic as a result of an external structure, but in real life, relationships are often characterized by the individuals' formal positions in a hierarchy (e.g. an organization or a family). For example, parent-child relationships are embedded in the context of the roles of "parent" and "child," so their interactions are not isolated transactions. Thus, despite being a dyadic interaction, parent and child are not simply influenced by the dynamics of an isolated case of interaction. These externally imposed structural characteristics of the dyad may influence advice transmission in the dyad. These research findings support the frustrated mother's cry: "You'd listen to me if I weren't your mother!" By extension, we can imagine a subordinate in an organization thinking (if not actually saying), "You'd listen to me if I didn't work for you."

Although advice generally flows from one individual to another, it does so in a social context. Cross, Borgatti, and Parker (2001) examined the advice network as the social aspect of knowledge sharing and development. They identified five types of informational benefits—solutions, meta-knowledge, problem reformulation, validation, and legitimation—as types of social relations in an organization. Employing these dimensions in a systematic network analysis, they found unidimensionality in these five

types of relations, such that an individual who provides any one of the benefits is likely to provide the others as well. The different types of relations were also indicative of social solidarity and subgroup boundaries within the organization. Advice was examined through the lens of social network analysis as its functionality is embedded and implied in the different types of informational benefits for enhancing the social network. The meanings and relationships among social relations have been understudied, both in general (Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2001) and in the particular case of upward advice transmission.

### **Advice Transmission in Formal Social Structures**

Social interactions rarely exist in vacuum; the formal structural characteristics of social relationships have been found to affect information transmission (e.g. Glauser, 1984). Advice transmission has been studied in the contexts of a number of explicitly hierarchical relationships. Advice from parents to children has been studied in the family (e.g. Greene & Grimsley, 1991; Tucker, Barber, & Eccles, 2001; Barber, 1994; McDowell, Parke, & Wang, 2003), advice from teachers and guidance counselors to students has been examined in schools (e.g. Laplan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001; Cherry, 1974), and medical and health advice from doctors and nurses to patients has been studied in hospitals and clinics (e.g. Pollack et al., 2002; Holden et al., 1989).

In the above studies, the advice flowed downwards from people with greater authority in the formal hierarchy to people lower in the hierarchy. There is also an explicit power dynamic in these relationships. According to Emerson (1962), person A has power over person B to the extent that person B is dependent on person A. In hierarchical relationships, the power dynamic exists prior to the advising relationship. In

organizations, subordinates are dependent on their superiors for their salaries and other needs, quite apart from asking their bosses for advice. In addition, superiors are positioned higher in the organization than subordinates. These positions are enforced not only functionally, but also through the informal working environment. As these power dynamics and relational hierarchies are already in place, advising—a type of power relationship in which one individual needs the advice of another—should flow from top to bottom with relative ease. One wonders, then, what conditions are needed for advice to flow upwards? What are the factors affecting upward advice transmission?

### **Leadership and Upward Advice Transmission**

Although upward advice transmission has received scant attention in empirical research, upward information flow in organizations has received more. A comprehensive review was conducted by Glauser (1984) to examine upward information flow in organizations for the enhancement of organizational functioning. In this review, Glauser highlights the importance of information from lower organizational levels for managerial decision making, for superior-subordinate relationship satisfaction, and for organizational performance. He identifies three factors that make upward information systems warrant special attention: (a) It is structurally more difficult for information to flow upwards, (b) superiors have finite cognitive capacity and can only process a certain amount of information, and (c) superiors' roles and requirements to direct, control, and reward subordinate behavior may make them uninterested in responding to upward information flow and unequipped to do so. Glauser uses five lenses to examine existing literature on upward information flow: (a) individual characteristics of the superior; (b) individual

characteristics of the subordinate; (c) the superior-subordinate relationship; (d) characteristics of the message; and (e) structural/contextual characteristics.

A similar framework may be employed to construct a theory of upward advice transmission in relational hierarchies, specifically of upward advice transmission to leaders in organizations.

### **Key Variables for the Study of Upward Advice Transmission to Leaders in Organizations**

Following the model of Glauser's (1984) review, we identify key variables which must be considered for the purposes of examining upward advice transmission to leaders in organizations. We will examine upward advice transmission through the lenses of (a) characteristics of the leader, (b) characteristics of the follower, (c) characteristics of the leader-follower relationship, (d) characteristics of the advice, and (e) structural characteristics of the relationship.

#### ***Leader (Advisee) Characteristics***

*Gender.* Investigation of gender differences is a tradition of empirical research. In a study of upward advice transmission in the family, Poon (2004) found that mothers were given significantly more advice from their adolescent children than were fathers. Although the study did not examine why this was the case, the presence of this difference suggests that the gender of the individual receiving advice may affect the frequency with which advice is given. In the same study, however, the gender of the advisor did not affect the frequency with which the individual received advice. While these findings were identified in a family systems, researchers may wish to see if they replicate to work organizations. The questions of whether gender directly influences upward advice

transmission or whether it is a moderating variable to other processes directly affecting upward advice transmission also awaits further clarification in research.

*Leadership Style.* Eagly et al. (2000) identified two types of attributes of leadership: *agentic* attributes include assertive, controlling, and confident tendencies, while *communal* attributes are those which involve concern for the welfare of other people. Leaders who possess more agentic attributes may be less likely to seek or receive advice from followers because of their feelings of confidence and their desire to control. As it has been found that reactive autonomy was negatively associated with accepting advice (Koestner et al., 2000), leaders who are reactively autonomous, assertive, and controlling may also be less likely to accept advice from others. On the other hand, leaders with communal tendencies, in their willingness to engage with others in a caring and sensitive manner (Eagly & Schmidt, 2001), may be more open to receiving advice from their followers.

*Authority and Power.* Kanter (1976) suggests that there is a distinction in organizations between leaders who are only authority figures and leaders who have real power. She argues that those with legitimate authority but with no real power exercise close supervision, are rule-minded, and are overly concerned with their own territory. Leaders who have real power and who are secure and confident in it are less likely to be defensively protective of it; such leaders may be more willing to receive upward advice from followers than leaders who have legitimate authority but not real power, because they do not feel threatened by the follower's advice. The leader's perception of his own positional power and his perception of external influences on this authority—such as

threat, as Kanter (1976) noted—may influence the extent to which he will receive upward advice.

*Perceived Openness.* It is likely that a subordinate's willingness to communicate upwards is strongly dependent on his or her perceptions of the superior's openness, evidenced by willingness to listen and to ask questions, demonstrated trust in the subordinate, willingness to approach the subordinate, and warmth (Poole, 1995).

*Empowering Behavior.* Conger and Kanungo (1988) define the key concept of empowerment as the enhancement of feelings of self-efficacy among members through identifying and removing conditions that foster powerlessness. They characterized empowerment as a process that involves a leader sharing power with his or her followers. As previously discussed, the advising relationship possesses a power dynamic. Upward advice transmission naturally counters the existing leader-follower power dynamic by creating a power dynamic in which the follower temporarily has greater power. Konczak, Stelly, and Trusty (2000) identified five dimensions of leaders' empowering behavior towards followers: (a) delegation of authority, (b) accountability, (c) information sharing, (d) skill development, and (e) self-directed decision making. Advising can comfortably fall under the dimension of delegation of authority in which the leader grants power or delegates authority to the follower. As upward advice transmission reverses the normal direction of the leader-follower power dynamic, leaders who tend to empower their followers may be more likely to receive upward advice than those who do not.

### ***Follower (Advisor) Characteristics***

*Gender.* While Poon (2004) found no effect of advisor gender in adolescents and young adults giving advice to their parents, a number of studies on upward information flow have found effects of subordinate gender (Sussman, Pickett, Berzinski, & Pearce, 1980; Young, 1978). In these studies, women were found to send information upward more frequently than men. Whether and how the gender of the follower/advisor affects upward advice transmission in the particular context of leadership should be examined.

*Followership.* Densten and Gray's (2001) review of the literature on the leader-follower influence relationship highlights the importance of examining leader behavior through the lens of the follower, particularly because followers can influence leader behavior (e.g. Kelley, 1992). While Densten and Gray conclude that followers should be understood as learners, their role as teachers should also be examined, particularly when followers could offer beneficial advice to leaders. Theories of followership should be examined more closely in relation to upward advice transmission.

*Credibility.* Advisors are asked for their advice because they are perceived to have experience, understanding, wisdom, or insight into a given situation (Yaniv, 2004). Followers who have established a history of credibility, sound judgment, experience, and good performance may be more likely to be advisors to their leaders than followers whose track record is not as strong. Credibility may be established over a prolonged period of time during which the follower demonstrates his or her commitment and contribution to the group's goals.

*Security.* The follower's sense of security may influence the extent to which he or she offers advice to his or her leader. Athanassiades (1973) has found, in a study of upward communication, that the subordinate's sense of security as measured by

Maslow's security-insecurity index is negatively correlated to distortion of information. As advice is, in part, a subjective opinion regarding a problem, the degree to which such advice is distorted to the benefit of the advisor may be affected by the advisor's security.

### ***The Leader-Follower Relationship***

*Gender Composition of the Dyad.* In a study of upward advice transmission in the family, Poon and Pittinsky (2004) found a non-significant trend of parent-gender and child-gender interaction in the frequency of upward advice transmission. Sussman et al. (1980) suggest that, in the context of the organization, the gender composition of the subordinate-superior relationship affects upward information flow. Whether these patterns still hold for upward advice transmission to leaders warrants further study.

*Age Composition of the Dyad.* Age is perhaps one of the most obvious and concrete social hierarchies, reflected in the common saying: "Older and wiser." Both the age of the leader and the age of the follower may affect upward advice transmission. For example, a young follower may feel insecure about advising an older leader. A young leader may welcome the advice of older followers, or the inverse may hold. Further research is needed.

*Power Asymmetry.* Earle, Giuliano, and Archer (1983) examined the effects of power on self-disclosure between two individuals. Slobin, Miller, and Porter (1968) found in a previous study that reciprocity in self-disclosure does not occur in asymmetrical relationships, and Earle et al. (1983) found that high-power individuals were less willing to initiate an intimate exchange than low-power individuals. Earle et al. also differentiated between role/positional and information power, pointing out the inherent weakness of information power compared to role power because the latter is



bolstered by external social agents. Positional power and informational power mirror the dichotomy within upward advice transmission. A leader has legitimate positional power over a follower, but a follower giving advice may have information power over the leader. As advice is a personal opinion regarding how a problem should be solved, the power asymmetry between leader and follower may affect the extent to which the follower/advisor is willing to disclose that personal opinion. Thus the mere existence and level of positional power should be examined in relation to upward advice transmission.

*Trust.* Trust in one's superior has been found to predict upward information flow (e.g. Gaines, 1980). It would be interesting to know whether the extent to which the leader trusts his or her followers affects upward advice transmission.

*Specific Forms of Leadership and Followership.* In recent years there has been an interest in identifying different functions and roles for both formal and informal authority figures in organizations (e.g. Owen & Lambert, 1998; Madzar, 2001). For example, Owen and Lambert (1998) evaluated and discussed the differences between leadership and management, suggesting that they may be overlapping but distinctive categories of roles. Madzar (2001) discussed differences between transformational and transactional leadership and found these leadership styles to have varying effects on subordinates' information inquiry. The heavy involvement of followers in the success of charismatic leadership calls for a view of leader and follower interaction. Charismatic leadership points up the importance of the leader in providing meaning for followers (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). A follower who identifies with a charismatic leader may interpret the world and the future through the eyes of the leader (Conger, 1989), yet still be able to identify problematic areas in which adjustments could be made. On the other hand, the

follower may be so captured by the leader's vision that he or she is unable to see reality objectively and empathically at the same time. Such a follower, seeing nothing but what the leader would see, would have no advice to offer the leader. In general, it is clear that leader-follower communication (or vice versa) is affected by the different styles of leadership and modes of followership. The effects of leadership and followership style specifically on upward transmission of advice awaits further study.

### ***Message Characteristics***

*Threats to Face.* The framework of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) suggests that advice carries inherent threats to the positive and negative face of advice recipients (Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000). According to Goldsmith and MacGeorge (2000), advice threatens the recipient's positive face by suggesting that he or she is unable to determine the appropriate course of action. It threatens negative face by prescribing a recommended course of action. Politeness theory predicts that advice from a speaker lacking power or closeness is more threatening than advice from a speaker with high power and a close relationship (Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000). Thus, upward advice transmission is more threatening to the recipient's face than is downward advice transmission. The way in which the advice is communicated may affect its likelihood of being accepted. Hummert and Mazloff (2001) found that impolite advice from younger individuals to older individuals was only received when given in a context in which the power dynamic was in alignment with the advising relationship; that is, when younger individuals had greater power over older individuals. Thus, whether the message is considered to be impolite is in part determined by the existing power dynamics in the social hierarchy. The extent to which the leader perceives the message as impolite may

affect his or her likelihood of accepting the advice. Similarly, followers may be cognizant of the potential for the advice to be perceived as patronizing or impolite, and may choose to deliver the upward advice in a manner that would be different if they were to deliver it downward.

*Domain.* Advisors tend to give advice in areas in which they have more experience or more wisdom than those receiving the advice (e.g. Tucker, Barber, & Eccles, 2001). Furthermore, individuals seek others' opinion when they perceive their own judgment to be insufficient in making the best decision. Thus, a leader may be more likely to solicit advice from a follower if the follower has greater experience or particular expertise or if the problem has greater complexity.

### ***Structural Characteristics***

*Rigidity of Organizational Structure.* Hierarchies—families, political parties, work groups, schools, and so on—differ in their rigidity. For example, family members do not get promoted to a more powerful position in the same way that a teacher may be promoted to the position of principal. Some structures may be more welcoming of upward advice transmission than others.

*Proximity.* Information flow in organizations is closely related to proximity (Miller, 1972). Bacharach and Aiken (1977) have demonstrated that interaction at the superior/subordinate level is correlated to the physical or structural distance between the superior and subordinate. In the same way, proximity may mediate the frequency of advice transmission from followers up to leaders.

*Organizational Level of the Dyad.* The organizational level of the leader/follower dyad may also affect upward advice transmission. Findings on the impact of

organizational level on the frequency of superior/subordinate interaction are inconsistent (Jablin, 1982). Some studies have found that subordinates at higher levels engage in more participative exchange with their superiors (e.g. Blankenship & Miles, 1968), while others have found that superior/subordinate contact is not affected by organizational level (Jablin, 1982). If upward advice transmission follows the pattern of general communication, it may be more frequent at higher levels of the organization.

### **Directions for Research**

This paper has reviewed research and theory pertaining to upward advice transmission to leaders in organizations, a type of information flow that has not been studied in depth. Based on this review, we propose steps for future research.

The contexts in which upward advice transmission occurs (the family, the various types of organization, and so on) should be surveyed. Researchers can then begin to conduct exploratory studies to identify the roles of various contextual influences on upward advice transmission.

The variables within these contexts that may affect upward advice transmission should be identified. This paper outlines a number of variables previously studied in upward information flow which may be applicable to upward advice transmission. Researchers must pay careful attention to interaction effects. The advice message itself may be influenced by certain variables, then be influenced by others when it is communicated. Researchers should identify which are primary variables affecting upward advice transmission (i.e. the variables that are universal to upward advice) and which are secondary variables (i.e. the variables pertaining to the individuals and/or the context in which upward advice is transmitted).

Identification of the key variables should be followed by examination of the process of upward advice transmission. The individuals involved in upward advice transmission, particularly the follower (as advisor), may experience a series of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral sequences before and during upward advice transmission. Each aspect of this sequence may be affected by variables at the various levels—individual, leader-follower dyad, and context. If upward advice transmission is indeed a sequential occurrence, researchers can examine each part in isolation in greater detail.

Finally, research needs to conduct an examination of good advice and bad advice. The literature on positive effects of upward advice transmission assumes that the advice given is good advice. An area of interest would be the effects of bad advice. How does bad advice affect the leader, the follower, and their relationship? The effects of bad advice may jeopardize the transmission of upward advice in the future.

### **Conclusion**

There is much to learn and much to gain by turning the advice-giving hierarchy upside down. While research attention has traditionally focused on advice flowing from those with higher positions in a hierarchy to those with lower positions in that hierarchy, the converse—upward advice transmission—has implications for effective leadership. Decision makers and influential individuals may benefit greatly from the advice of those below them in their organizational hierarchies. Upward advice transmission has the potential to inform leaders of the perspectives from below; this is particularly important to a leader whose primary purpose is to serve his or her followers.

Receiving advice can make help a leader make more accurate decisions and judgments (Yaniv, 2004) and can benefit meta-knowledge, problem reformulation,

validation, legitimation, and problem solving (Cross, 2000). Leaders can reap these benefits not only from their peers but also from their followers. In particular, followers may be able to offer the leader useful advice regarding decisions that affect the followers.

Upward advice transmission may also be beneficial to followers. Those followers who feel empowered by their leaders report a greater sense of self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988), which may improve the quality of their work experience and subsequently their performance. When followers give advice to their leaders, they may feel encouraged to engage actively in finding a solution.

The relationship between leader and follower may be enhanced by increased communication in the form of advice. If followers are able to overcome the hierarchical power of leader authority, and if receiving upward advice is also a positive experience for the leader, communication of the follower's personal opinion may enhance the leader's view of the follower.

Leaders in organizations are often confronted with the challenge of filtering information so that it is at an optimum level for processing. Miller (1964) has identified a number of negative responses to information overload, such as omission and error. If information can be filtered and processed first by followers in such a way that a number of crystallized options can be discussed as solutions, leaders may be able to survey these pieces of advice and choose the proposed solution that is most appropriate.

Upward advice transmission can also diffuse the negative outcomes of leadership insulation. Leaders at higher levels of the hierarchy are often insulated from their followers' experiences and feedback, in some cases for the sake of maintaining an optimal level of information flow. But this leaves the leader vulnerable when problems

arise about which he or she knows little or nothing. A context in which advice more readily flows upward might reduce leader insulation and foster openness and honesty.

Thus, research on the reversal of the normal flow of advice from those with more power to those with less will shed light on organizations as they are and as they might be.

## Notes

(1) The use of advice is equally common in decision making outside organizations, for problem solving and the navigation of unfamiliar or complex issues. A review of bestseller booklists reveals the prevalence, popularity, and importance of advice in today's society, as well as the wide range of areas in which advice is sought and received.



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