

Influence of Power Bases on Leadership Strategies Adopted by Managers' in Information Technology Organizations

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Abstract

Power is an integral and inescapable part of organizations. No manager can be efficient without understanding and using power in an appropriate manner. Today, managers need to make a transition from guiding and leading to shaping and influencing the growth by the ways in which they approach their work and interact with one another. The literature generally suggests that effective leaders express their need for power and influence in ways that create value to the organization.

The present investigation focuses on power bases of managers and its influence on type of leadership strategies adopted by managers to lead their employees. 515 respondents representing 87 I.T companies were surveyed. Two standardized, valid and reliable instruments were used to measure the constructs. Leadership Strategies developed by Robert A. Cooke's (1996) was adopted with permission and French and Raven's (1959) bases of power was measured using a modified version of Hinkin and Schriesheim's (1989). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability for the scales were 0.88 and above, the stratified random sampling technique was adopted. The major findings suggest that the Legitimate Power needs to be leveraged most in IT organizations as it significantly influences Prescriptive and Restrictive leadership strategies. The findings, conclusions, implications and suggestions for further research have been discussed.

Key Words: Power bases, Formal power bases, Personal power bases, Leadership strategies, Prescriptive strategy, Restrictive strategy.

1. Introduction

Power is one of the most important motives that individuals strive for. Power and influence can be studied from various angles. No organization is devoid of power. Organizations can be perceived as politically negotiated orders. Organizational charts are mainly provided to describe the formal allocation of power that is positional power, to job titles. They also indicate other functions such as collective, individual and position power, and the way it is attained is a vital area of concern. The use or misuse of power could be analyzed in two segments a) For personal effectiveness or and b) for organizational effectiveness. Most conceptions are based on Webers' (1947) classic definition that, "Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will, despite resistance and regardless of the basis on which this probability rests". The leader has more than one person to lead, has the power to affect others and has a goal to attain. The key point in differentiating leadership and management is the idea that employees willingly follow leaders because they want to, not because they have to. Managerial behaviour in information technology organizations is affected by leadership behaviour. To acquire and retain power, a leader must skillfully use organizational politics – informal approaches to gaining power through means other than merit or luck.

1.2 Leadership Behaviour: 'Leadership is the ability to inspire confidence and support among the people who are needed to achieve organizational goals' Kim & Mauborgne (1992). An organization has the greatest chance of being successful when all employees work toward achieving its goal. Since leadership involves the exercise of influence by one person over others, the quality of leadership is a critical determinant of organizational and managerial behaviour. Wallace et al (2011) found that empowering leadership climate relates to psychological empowerment climate. Hunter et al (2011) have argued that the pursuit of innovation requires a unique leadership approach – one that may not be currently captured by traditional views of leadership. Creativity and innovation and how leadership effects team creativity has been documented by Reiter-Palmon (2011). Managing the innovative process and the dynamic role of leaders and how their cognition and social behaviours need to adapt to effectively and efficiently manage innovation have been detailed by Stenmark et al (2011). Schaubroeck et al (2011) found that servant leadership influenced team performance through affect-based trust and team psychological safety, Boies et al (2010) found that team potency and trust were positively related to shared transformational leadership and negatively related to passive avoidant leadership. Sosik & Cameron (2010) proposed that leaders first create an ascetic self-construal that derives from character strengths and virtues and then project this self image through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration behaviour. Gentry et al (2011) found the biggest gaps among generations in leading employees, change management, and building and mending relationships. Most of the recent literature review highlights the fact that freeing, autonomous, interdependent and prescriptive leader behaviour creates the right climate for employees to be more able, willing, agile and ready to engage in meaningful and innovative behaviours at the workplace. Kotter (1990) observed that managers must know how to lead as

well as manage. Hoogh, Hartog & Koopman (2005) found that, consistent with trait activation theory, the perceived dynamic work environment moderated four of the Big Five personality traits with both charismatic and transactional leadership. Also, charismatic leadership was positively related to perceived effectiveness, but only in dynamic contexts. Conger's (1989) research suggested that empowering practices by leader includes providing a positive emotional atmosphere, rewarding and encouraging in visible and personal ways, expressing confidence, fostering initiative and responsibility, and building on success, praising initiative, and practicing super leadership.

1.3 Contrasting Leadership and Power Processes: Leadership behaviour and power processes are closely related. Leaders use power as a means of attaining group goals. Leaders achieve goals and power as a means to facilitate their achievements. The differences between the two are related to Goal compatibility – (A) power does not require goal compatibility but merely dependence. Leadership requires some congruence between the goals of the leader and those being led. (B) Direction of influence of one's subordinates – it minimizes the importance of lateral and upward influence patterns. (C) Leadership research on style and power has tended to encompass a broader area and focus on tactics for gaining compliance. The research by Carpenter, A & Golden Our, B.R.(1997) suggest that a manager's 'fit' with an industry or firm may depend on their personality characteristics. The findings in their study reveal that an external locus orientation may be most functional in highly deterministic or low discretion environments and organizations (e.g., in regulated firms). In contrast, this orientation may be less functional in either highly discretionary or fast moving markets in which managerial action is particularly valuable. The study on retail sales managers' bases of social power highlights that non coercive sources of power were generally related to higher overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with the supervisor, while coercive power was inversely associated with satisfaction with supervisor. Negative relationships were found between retail sales managers' legitimate and expert power and retail sales person's role conflict. (Skinner et al., 1984).

1.4 Power, Politics and Leadership: Metatriangulation is a concept that helps us view the multiple conceptualizations of the relationships between power and IT. From one perspective, IT may be seen as a driver of change in power structures and processes. Alternatively, the creation and introduction of IT can be seen as a process that involves interested parties to intentionally using their power to affect the nature of the systems that are put in place. At a more complex level, expectations regarding changes to power structures and power can serve as an important factor in decisions to adopt, promote, or develop IT even if the actions that result are not themselves particularly power-laden or political. IT can be used to create symbols and meaning that reinforce current power structures or to mold altered structures. (Jasperson et al., 2002). Organizational power is derived from many sources mentioned earlier and can also stem from ownership, providing resources, capitalizing upon opportunity, and being close to power. Leaders who intend on increasing their power should develop a plan which must include setting a goal, measuring the cost effectiveness of politicking, conducting power analyses of powerful people, and analyzing what type of politics is played at the top. To make effective use of organizational politics, leaders must be aware of specific political tactics and strategies. Techniques aimed at ethical means of gaining power, building relationships, and avoiding political blunders should be encouraged through effective leadership. If I.T organizations have to increase their effectiveness in goal achievement, unethical means such, as embrace-or-demolish strategy must be discouraged. It has been found that structural and productive power differ in a critical respect that the former works through direct structural relations, the latter entails more generalized and diffuse social processes. Specifically, structural power is structural constitution, that is, the production and reproduction of internally related positions of super-and subordination domination. Productive power, by contrast, is the constitution of all social subjects with various social powers through systems of knowledge and discursive practices of broad and general social scope. Conceptually, the move is away from structures, per se, to systems of signification and meaning (which are structured, but not to themselves structures), and to networks of social forces perpetually shaping one another. In that respect, attention to productive power looks beyond or is post structures. (Barnett & Duvall, 2005).

1.5 The Role of Power in Leadership: Power plays a major role in the interactions occurring in organizational life. Power over others is intertwined with an understanding of leadership processes. Yet, despite the relevance of power to organizations and the understanding of the leadership process, research studies of power and leadership are not well integrated (Hollander & Offermann, 1990). McClelland (1970) demonstrated how effective leadership could be instrumental in promoting social disaster. The tendency has been to examine the intentional and overt behavior of individuals and groups and the effects of power. Pfeffer's (1981) review of research on power notes, the focus of most studies of power in organizations is "on hierarchical power, the power of supervisors over subordinates, or bosses over employees", power which serves as functionalist imperatives.

The present study explores IT managers' power processes and the influence it has on the leadership strategies adopted in

information technology organizations.

1.6 Need and Rationale: The importance of power in organization needs to be overemphasized, as it is one of the essential components of practically every organization. A clear understanding of organizations requires a thorough analysis of power as one of its central features and how they influence leadership processes. Since power is often viewed negatively, there has been a strong tendency to obscure it, Zaleznick (1970). Executives are reluctant to acknowledge the place of power both in individual and in the organizational relationships. Some managers withdraw into the safety of organizational logic. There are a few studies investigating these variables and its relationships have not been clearly established in the Indian context. Since the Indian I.T sector is viewed as the sunrise sector, the study will be more meaningful as it intends to provide some new insights in the knowledge worker context. Therefore the study gains importance.

This study is an attempt to contribute afresh a new perspective to the field of behavioral sciences with special reference to power processes and leadership of managers in information technology organizations. It is also an earnest attempt to bridge the gap especially in this area by highlighting the relevance and importance of power processes and leadership to management, individual, and organizational effectiveness. It is hoped that this study will initiate a series of serious and productive discussions on the subject.

2.1 Methodology

2.1 Objectives

1. To understand the power bases utilized by managers.
2. To find out the leadership strategies adopted and to establish the linkage between power bases and leadership strategies in the IT context.

2.2 Sample Size: The research was carried out on a sample size of 515 respondents from 87 IT companies. The sample was drawn from all the three levels of management. 305 IT employees from the junior level executives, 148 from the middle level managers and 62 from the senior level management were administered the questionnaire. The stratified random sampling technique was adopted for the present study. The inclusion criteria were employees with minimum one year work experience and have known their boss for one year was only asked to fill the questionnaire.

2.3 Measures: Managerial power was assessed by using French & Raven's (1959) power-based taxonomy. French & Raven's (1959) bases of power is measured using a modified version of Hinkin and Schriesheim's (1989) 25-item power scale, as adapted by Nesler, Aguinis, Quigley and Tedeschi (1993). The scale employs a nine-point response scale (1 = Disagree; 9 = Agree), and consists of six subscales: coercive power, expert power, legitimate power, referent power, reward power and credibility. Based on the results of a CFA supporting five power factors, these items were used to create five composite scales: coercive power (3 items, $\alpha = 0.71$); expert power (4 items, $\alpha = 0.76$); legitimate power (4 items, $\alpha = 0.81$); referent power (4 items, $\alpha = 0.89$); reward power (3 items, $\alpha = 0.77$); and credibility (5 items, $\alpha = 0.70$). The nine-point scale was reduced to a seven-point scale (1 = Disagree; 7 = Agree) and used for the present study. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability statistics for all items for the above instruments on the present sample was .962.

Leadership Strategies instrument, developed by Robert A. Cooke's (1996) description by others inventory was adopted. Leadership strategies have 60 statements and the inventory uses a five-point scale (1 = Never; 5 = Always) Restrictive strategies (30 statements) and Prescriptive strategies (30 statements). This is divided into 2 domains (12 statements) for the Restrictive and Prescriptive behaviours in the Personal category. 5 domains (30 statements) for the Restrictive and Prescriptive behaviours in the Interpersonal category. 5 domains (18 statements) for the Restrictive and Prescriptive behaviours in the Organizational category. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability for the above scale on the present sample was 0.88.

2.4 Respondent Profile: The distribution of respondents along demographic variables was as follows: 60% of the respondents were junior level executives, 28% were middle level managers and 12% were senior managers. 72% of the respondents supervised more than three employees and 28% supervised two and less employees. 80% of the respondents were male and 20% female. 52% of the respondents were below between 21 - 25 years of age, 24% were between 26 - 30 years of age, 16% were between 31 - 35 years and 8% were in the age group 41 - 45 years. 4% of the respondents were diploma holders, 64% had completed a bachelors degree, 28% masters degree and 4% other professional certificates/courses. 72% of the respondents were unmarried, 24% married, 4% divorced or widowed. 28% of the respondents had one year of work experience, 36% 1 - 3 years, 8% 3 - 5 years, 8% 5 - 7 years, 12% 7 - 9 years and 8% had above 9 years work experience.

3.0 Findings

Table 1 Indicating the mean and standard deviation in descending order for the power bases of managers in I.T organizations

Power Bases	Mean	Std. Deviation
Legitimate Power	5.57	1.30
Referent Power	5.36	1.34
Expert Power	5.17	1.44
Credibility Power	4.98	1.43
Reward Power	4.82	1.43
Coercive Power	3.20	1.45

Table 1 indicates that managers in IT organizations adopt the legitimate formal power base, referent and expert personal power bases to a great extent to get work done. This is followed by credibility personal power base and reward formal power bases that are used to a moderate extent and coercive formal power base to a less extent to get work done by managers.

This indicates that the personal power bases were used to a greater extent than the formal bases. In formal groups and organizations, the most frequent access of power is one's structural position. It represents the power a person receives as a result of his/her position in the formal hierarchy and includes coercive and reward power (legitimate power). This is followed by identification with a person who has desirable resources or personal traits (referent power) and influence wielded as a result of expertise, special skill, or knowledge (expert power).

The moderate exercise of power comes from the manager being reliable, speaks the truth, does what s/he says and follows it up, and the person can be trusted and believed (credibility power). Subordinates comply because doing so produces positive benefits. The power which enables a manager to distribute rewards that subordinates view as valuable (reward power).

The least exercise of power by managers originates from the base that is dependent on fear and rests on the application, or the threat of application, of physical sanctions or control by force of basic physiological or safety needs (coercive power).

Table 2: Indicating the mean, standard deviation on leadership strategies adopted by managers actually and ideally in I.T organizations

Leadership Strategies	Mean (Actual)	Mean (Ideal)	Std. Deviation (Actual)	Std. Deviation (Ideal)
Prescriptive Leadership Strategies	3.49	4.82	.734	.872
Restrictive Leadership Strategies	3.04	1.95	.480	.679

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According to Cooke (2008) the means of the actual prescriptive (3.49) and restrictive (3.04) strategies are equal that they cancel out each other and this will decrease the Constructive impact and increase the Passive/Defensive impact on others. However the ideal prescriptive (4.82) and restrictive (1.95) strategies required indicate that Prescriptive strategies are strong and do have a Constructive impact on others.

Indian I.T managers are engaged in Prescriptive leadership strategies more than Restrictive strategies. The differences between the means of prescriptive and restrictive leadership strategies are not very great. However IT managers basically believe in strategies that guide or direct the activities and behaviours of employees toward goals, opportunities and methods as compared to strategies which constrain or prohibit activities and behaviours with respect to goals, opportunities and methods. Prescriptive leadership strategies provide employees with a direction to channel their efforts, models regarding how things should be done, positive reinforcement to encourage the repetition of desired behaviours, and a set of parameters specifying their sphere of influence. This strategy is followed by Restrictive leadership strategies which provides employees with directions that should not be pursued, models regarding behaviours they should avoid, negative feedback to discourage the repetition of undesired behaviours, and a set of parameters restricting their sphere of influence.

Hypothesis 1: There will be no significant relationship between power bases adopted and leadership strategies in IT organizations.

Table 3: Indicating Pearson correlations among Power bases and leadership strategies adopted by managers in IT organizations

Power Bases	Prescriptive leadership strategy	Sig.	Restrictive leadership strategy	Sig.
Coercive power	-.243**	.000	.171**	.000
Expert power	.636**	.000	.252**	.000
Legitimate power	.605**	.000	.309**	.000
Referent power	.672**	.000	.267**	.000
Reward power	.508**	.000	.354**	.000
Credibility power	.704**	.000	.282**	.000

* Pearson correlation significant at the 0.05 level. ** Pearson correlation significant at the 0.01 level.

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Hypothesis 1 was rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted as it was found that coercive (-.243**) power base was negatively correlated to prescriptive and positively correlated (.171**) to restrictive leadership strategies. Expert (.636**), legitimate (.605**), referent (.672**), reward (.508**) and credibility (.704**) power bases were all positively correlated to prescriptive leadership strategies and restrictive leadership strategies. However, the strongest correlation was found between credibility (.704**) power base and prescriptive leadership strategy, followed by referent (.672**), expert (.636**), legitimate (.605**) and reward (.508**) power bases and prescriptive leadership strategy. The other relationships were not strong especially power bases and restrictive leadership strategies. All the correlations were statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Hypothesis 2: Power bases adopted will not significantly influence leadership strategies in IT organizations.

Table 4: Indicating (coefficients) step-wise multiple regression of Prescriptive leadership strategy on the Power base variables

Power Base Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
Referent Power	.099	.035	.154	2.810
Credibility Power	.244	.027	.355	8.901
Legitimate Power	.104	.034	.167	3.106
Reward Power	.098	.021	.138	4.749
Coercive Power	.061	.015	.060	4.131
Expert Power	.088	.028	.132	3.083

* Significant at the 0.05 level. ** Significant at the 0.01 level.

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Hypothesis 2 was rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted as it was found that all the six power bases significantly influenced prescriptive leadership strategy. Credibility power base had the strongest influence followed by legitimate, referent, reward, expert and the least being coercive power base. Together these six power bases explained 97.8% (R Square = .978) of the variation in the prescriptive leadership strategy.

Table 5: Indicating (coefficients) step-wise multiple regression of Restrictive leadership strategy on the Power base variables

Power Base Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
Legitimate Power	.150	.024	.279	6.146
Coercive Power	.220	.015	.252	14.689
Credibility Power	.164	.023	.277	7.161

Reward Power	.127	.020	.208	6.298
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* Significant at the 0.05 level.

** Significant at the 0.01 level.

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It was found that legitimate, coercive, credibility; reward power bases significantly influenced restrictive leadership strategy. Legitimate power base had the strongest influence followed by credibility, coercive and the least being reward power base. Together these four power bases explained 96.8% (R Square = .968) of the variation in the restrictive leadership strategy.

Tables 4 and 5 results indicate that the null hypothesis H2 is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted that there is a significant influence of power bases adopted by managers and its influence on the leadership strategies used by managers in IT organizations.

At the micro level analysis it was found only legitimate, credibility, coercive and reward power bases influenced the restrictive leadership strategies. Expert and referent power bases did not influence restrictive leadership strategies. This influence was statistically significant at the 0.01 level of significance.

4. 0 Discussion: As significant Positive association was found between expert, legitimate, referent, Reward, and credibility Power bases and Prescriptive leadership strategies it is recommended that these Power bases need to be used more in service and IT organizations. As Legitimate Power base significantly influenced Prescriptive and Restrictive leadership strategies, it needs to be leveraged by managers appropriately that they need to make polite and clear requests, explain the reasons for a request, do not exceed the scope of authority, verify authority if necessary, follow proper channels, follow up to verify compliance, and insist on compliance if appropriate (Yukl, 2006).

The study indicates that referent Power bases significantly influenced Prescriptive leadership strategy, therefore to increase the effectiveness of the use of referent Power base managers need to show acceptance and positive regard, act supportive and helpful, use sincere forms of ingratiation, defend and backup people when appropriate, do unsolicited favours, make self sacrifices to show concern, and keep promises (Yukl, 2006).

As expert Power bases significantly influenced Prescriptive leadership strategy, managers need to engage in behaviours such as explaining reasons for request or proposal and why it is important, provide evidence that a proposal will be successful, do not make rash, careless, or inconsistent statements, do not lie, exaggerate, or misrepresent the facts, listen seriously to employees concerns and suggestions, and act confident and decisive in a crisis (Yukl, 2006). As Reward Power base significantly influenced Prescriptive leadership strategy, to increase the effectiveness of the use of Reward Power base, managers can offer rewards that are fair and ethical, set clear expectations regarding offer of rewards (Yukl, 2006).

The study indicates that Coercive Power base significantly influenced Restrictive leadership strategy. Managers need to increase the effectiveness of using coercive Power base particularly to discipline employees. Care should be taken that employees be made aware of the rules and regulations, and ensure that employees understand the serious consequences of violations, reprimand and warn in private. The manager should express a sincere desire to help the employee comply with role expectation, include the employee in suggesting ways to correct a problem and seek agreement on a concrete plan, and use Punishments that are legitimate, and fair. (Yukl, 2006).

As expert Power base significantly influenced satisfaction with work, enhancing personal Power bases of managers will enhance employee satisfaction and reduce the adverse effects of the positional Power bases (Rahim, 1989). Providing managers with appropriate education and training, opportunities to engage in appropriate job experiences and human relations training will help to overcome the deficiency in their expert and referent Power bases.

Empowerment process can also be introduced as an informal Power base to influence employees. 'Empowerment represents a means of Power acquisition that has not been included in the models of Power. Unlike other forms of Power acquisition, empowerment is unique in that it involves an intentional and often formal process of structural and behavioural change designed to grant Power to individuals or group who previously did not enjoy structural advantages that provide Power (Liden and Arad, 1996). A conscious movement from positional to personal Power bases by sharing Power with employees will expand the amount of Power in organizations and can have desirable impact on employee's productivity and satisfaction.

5.0 Implications of Leadership: In the new people-economy, today's organizational credo is increasingly 'It knows therefore it is.' People drive organizations to success or failure. People as a resource have gained paramount importance in most CEOs' comments and annual reports. Organizations today are service oriented and operate in a turbulent and fast changing environment. Knowledge workers not only drive these organizations, they are its key resource. In the words of Drucker (1966) 'Every knowledge worker in modern organization is an executive" if, by virtue of his position or knowledge, he is responsible for a contribution that materially affects the capacity of the organization to perform and to

obtain results. Therefore there is a need for new methods that will make the improvements in knowledge-worker productivity that will be required in the 21st century.

Drucker (2001) identifies major factors for knowledge-worker productivity in the future which is relevant for IT companies. In the IT context. Managers should understand the fact that autonomy and feedback gives room for creativity and innovation. IT employees should be given opportunities for continuous learning for growth and development. The productivity of an IT employee should not be assessed based on the quantity of output rather based on quality of the output. Knowledge workers feel engaged and involved when they are treated as assets than being treated as costs.

Managers potentially have numerous tools at their disposal for increasing their effectiveness. The most important tool revolves around the strategy, skills and behaviours that have been shown through research to be related to measures of leadership performance. Prescriptive strategies generally are more effective than Restrictive strategies. It serves to define a direction for the system, establish structures for organization learning and adaptation, and support processes for problem solving and the integration of organizational components. They create and reinforce an organizational culture that communicates Constructive norms and expectations to members.

6.0 Suggestions for Further Research

This study should be replicated in other sectors such as the manufacturing, service and hospitality, financial sectors to ascertain if the findings hold true in all organizations. Other instruments can be adopted to find out the power processes such as influence tactics and its impact on leadership. Studies need to focus on effectiveness and efficiency of each power dimension to raise role innovation and positive affective responses. Research is needed to enhance the understanding of the interrelationships of Power, conflict-management strategies, and propensity to leave a job. As the study was conducted in the IT sector other sectors need to be studied to compare and contrast the results so that the generalizability of the findings can be increased. Other models and relationships can be developed and tested with reference to power bases and leadership strategies. Other human resource management and organizational behaviour variables can be investigated as dependent variables

7.0 Limitations of the Study

The self-report of power bases and leadership strategies that were taken from each respondent present the problem of common method variance. This problem is reduced as the reliability and validity of the instruments were found to be high. The scope of the present study can be extended to do a path analysis among the variables. The number of items and the length of the questionnaire could have had an effect on the responses, as the respondent took one hour to complete the entire questionnaire. Although confidentiality was assured to the respondents, it is not sure whether the social desirability factor could have been reduced.

8.0 Conclusions

The findings of the present study pinpoint certain relevant conclusions, particularly focusing on the centrality of Power processes and leadership as critical Independent variables. This research indicated that all six Power bases significantly influenced Prescriptive leadership strategy and therefore organizations to increase job satisfaction and if the response to dissatisfaction must be Constructive then managers must use these Power bases effectively at the workplace.

As Prescriptive leadership strategy had a Constructive impact on employees, organizations need to nurture and imbibe as part of their organization culture the behaviours that reinforce Prescriptive leadership behaviours and decrease Restrictive leadership strategy so that Passive/Defensive and Aggressive/Defensive behaviours are reduced?

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