



Superiors' Participatory Management Behaviour: Perception of Agriculture Officers in Banking Sector

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ABSTRACT

The quality of the superior-subordinate relationship can significantly impact various aspects of participatory management behaviour. The study was conducted in 2022 to assess the superiors' behaviour as perceived by a randomly selected 180 agriculture officers working in public sector banks in the state of West Bengal. Superiors' behaviour was assessed based on the four domains; motivation, communication, coordination, and empathy which included 20 aspects on which responses of the selected agriculture officers were obtained on a 5-point continuum scale. Superiors' behavioural characteristics were derived by mean perception score. Superiors' motivating nature was found to be most admired by the respondents. Using ANOVA and post hoc tests, significant differences were identified between the groups of agriculture officers categorised based on the job experience in the banks with respect to various dimensions of superiors' behaviour. Respondents with experience of >10 years perceived overall superiors' behaviour lowly (68.49) as compared to the other two groups with experience of up to five years (75.86) and >5-10 years (75.27), respectively. Such differences based on experience need to be addressed to create a more cohesive and thriving work environment for the agriculture officers in the banking sector to provide better financial assistance to the farmers.

INTRODUCTION

Participative management is an advanced concept in the modern management world, particularly within the Indian context. It involves soliciting employees' opinions and inputs regarding decision-making and policy formulation within the organisation. Participatory management represents a paradigm shift from a top-down approach to a more self-driven and self-sustained approach. The participatory management is to empower employees and enhance their understanding of problems, allowing them to explore and generate potential solutions through democratic spirit and active participation and known as the third managerial revolution. The first revolution was the establishment of the hierarchical structure, while the second revolution was the separation of management

from ownership and the invention of management professionalisation. Developing competencies and understanding the organization and its employees are essential to maintain a competitive advantage (Vakola et al., 2007; Bengue et al., 2011). Participatory management is essentially a method of empowering employees or subordinates by providing information, expertise, authority, and rewards to the lower layer of an organisation (Miah & Bird, 2007). Allowing employees to engage in decision-making has been demonstrated in several studies to boost motivation, job performance, and organisational growth (Bhuiyan, 2010).

Most organisations have a well-established hierarchical system; thus, employees are classified as superior and subordinates. The leadership qualities of the immediate supervisors have a direct bearing on the productivity of the employees, which in turn

determines the efficiency in providing required services to the client system (Ponnusamy et al., 2014). The superior-subordinate relationship becomes vital for the proper implementation of participative management. With the growing acceptance that employees often have something valuable to contribute beyond the expected levels of their standard work in a participative management framework, superiors and/or managers need to expand their understanding of the principles, techniques and approaches involved in management (Kumar et al., 2022). In an era where traditional hierarchical structures are replaced with collaborative models, the behaviour of the superior holds significance. No longer confined to command-and-control paradigms, modern managers are expected to engage, inspire, and empower their teams. The dichotomy of superior-subordinate interactions has evolved from rigid directives to inclusive dialogues, where open communication and approachability foster an environment conducive to innovation and growth. As such, understanding the nuances of superior behaviour becomes imperative for organisations striving to thrive in this dynamic landscape.

Agriculture being diverse and full of contradictions (Alston & Pardey, 2014) has a larger implication for financial inclusion (Chattopadhyay, 2011). With the dual expertise of agriculture and finance, Agricultural Field Officers (AFOs) in the banking sector stand as an imperative asset. The duties of the AFO include promoting rural financing, disbursal of agri-loans, review of agri-loans, reporting to higher authorities, collaboration with NABARD and RRBs. Participative management behaviour will empower AFOs to efficiently perform these duties and enable them to respond swiftly to emerging financial challenges in the agricultural sector for sustainable agricultural development. Thus, a positive superior-subordinate relationship will set the tone for participative management culture in banks by empowering and motivating employees to actively contribute to the decision-making process. Against this backdrop, present study was undertaken.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in West Bengal, where a simple random sample of 180 agriculture officers working in the public sector banks with varied job duration in two randomly selected districts using simple random sampling, namely, Birbhum and Murshidabad, were chosen as respondents. The respondents were further categorised depending on their years of services in the banks for delineating significant differences amongst the groups of respondents based on job experience; accordingly it was found that, there were 56 respondents working up to 5 years, 79 respondents for >5 to 10 years, and 45 respondents for >10 years. A questionnaire was developed for the present study following Burhanuddin (2013) and the perception of respondents about their superiors' behaviour was measured based on four domains, namely, motivation, communication, cooperation, and empathy. Motivation considered the superiors' abilities to influence, build confidence, reward, and encourages subordinates. Superiors' communication behaviour was measured in terms of group discussion, individual interaction, upward communication, information, and clarification of the roles of subordinates. The cooperation dimension included group ideas, cooperative attitude, cooperative teamwork, including

subordinates in decision-making and setting organisation goals. Empathy was operationalised as showing trust and confidence, satisfaction with achievements, friendly interaction, and understanding the job-related problems of the subordinates. Responses were obtained on a total of 20 items under four dimensions on a five-point continuum scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) for the positive statements and reverse for negative statements. Collected data were compiled and analysed using SPSS v27 software. Descriptive statistics like mean, standard deviation (SD), and coefficient of variation (COV) 'were used to measure the central tendency of the population. The index values for each of the four dimensions and overall superiors' behaviour were calculated as follows:

Superiors Behaviour Index (SBI_i) was calculated as given below:

$$SBI_i = \Sigma(MI_i + CI_i + COI_i + EI_i)$$

Where, *i* indicates number of respondents, MI_i (Motivation index) = $\Sigma MI_{ij} / \Sigma j$, *j* (=1,2, ...) denotes motivation items, CI_i (Communication index) = $\Sigma C_{ik} / \Sigma k$, *k* (=1,2, ...) denotes communication items, COI_i (Coordination index) = $\Sigma CO_{il} / \Sigma l$, *l* (=1,2, ...) denotes coordination items, EI_i (Empathy index) = $\Sigma E_{im} / \Sigma m$, *m* (=1,2, ...) denotes empathy items.

The ANOVA and post hoc tests were applied to find out the significant differences between perceptions of three groups of agriculture officers on four dimensions and overall superiors' behaviour.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A comprehensive analysis of perceptions of agriculture officers working in public sector banks regarding different facets of their superiors' behaviour indicates differential opinions (Table 1). The superiors were successful in fostering a supportive and motivating work environment in the bank for most of the agriculture officers as evident from the responses of the respondents. The study indicated that the superiors were successful in exerting influence in a voluntary and honest manner. Additionally, respondents also acknowledged their superiors' ability to create confidence in them. Most respondents held a positive perception of their superiors' ability to encourage in implementation of decisions and to inspire group members to strive for high-performance goals as indicated by mean perception scores. However, motivating subordinates through rewards was less favourable that needed attention of the management in banking organisations.

The communication domain was studied with a set of five statements. The findings highlighted the importance of effective communication between superiors and subordinates to inculcate participatory management behaviour in the banking sector. It was evident that superiors actively engaged in providing work-related information and discussed office-related work with their subordinates. It was evident that superiors maintained a clear flow of information within the bank by ensuring that subordinates understood their roles and by effectively passing information both downward and upward throughout the organisation. The study also indicated that there were areas that can be improved in terms of effectively communicating with subordinates individually to address their specific individual as well as shared concerns.

Table 1. Perceptions of the agriculture officers on different aspects of their superiors' behaviour

S.No.	Items	Mean	SD	COV
	Motivation			
1.	Influence subordinates voluntarily	3.73	0.97	26.01
2.	Influence subordinates honestly	3.88	0.98	25.26
3.	Tries to create subordinates' confidence in superior	3.73	1.05	28.15
4.	Motivate subordinates through rewards	3.61	0.92	25.48
5.	Encourage subordinates to implement the decisions	3.78	1.02	26.98
6.	Encourage group members to strive for high-performance goals	3.73	1.12	30.03
	Overall motivation	3.74	0.82	21.93
	Communication			
7.	Group discussion with subordinates about related office works	3.79	1.01	26.65
8.	Interact with each subordinate individually	3.37	1.23	36.50
9.	Upward and downward information flow accurately	3.71	0.96	25.88
10.	Provide information about work-related topics	3.89	0.86	22.11
11.	Make subordinates understand their role in accomplishing organisational goals	3.67	1.12	30.52
	Overall communication	3.69	0.84	22.76
	Cooperation			
12.	Get group ideas to find solutions for organisational problem	3.74	0.97	25.94
13.	Show a co-operative attitude with subordinates	3.66	1.15	31.42
14.	Indicate cooperative teamwork	3.94	0.87	22.08
15.	Involve all subordinates in the decision-making process	3.30	1.24	37.58
16.	Involve all members in proposing organisational goals	3.67	1.15	31.34
	Overall cooperation	3.66	0.96	26.23
	Empathy			
17.	Show trust and confidence in subordinates	3.88	0.99	25.52
18.	Show high satisfaction on the achievements of subordinates	3.53	1.03	29.18
19.	Friendly interaction with subordinates	3.73	1.08	28.95
20.	Know well the job problems faced by subordinates	3.42	1.25	36.55
	Overall empathy	3.64	0.89	24.45
	Overall Superiors' behaviour	3.69	0.83	22.49

The culmination of the findings further revealed that the respondents highly appreciated the superior's emphasis on fostering cooperative teamwork and utilising a participatory approach in problem-solving within the banking organisations. It was also evident that the superiors emphasised the importance of collaboration and teamwork with the subordinates to work cooperatively (mean perception score 3.94). Furthermore, these findings underscored the prevailing recognition among participants regarding the superiors' encouragement for active participation from all members in setting organisational goals. However, there was a need for closer attention to involving subordinates in the decision-making process as the respondents were divided regarding this characteristic. The study also revealed that respondents believed that their superiors had established a positive, supportive, and cordial relationship with them, fostering trust and confidence in their abilities. Superiors also acknowledged and appreciated the accomplishments of their subordinates, creating a positive and motivating work environment. However, there were opportunities for superiors to further enhance their understanding of job problems faced by the subordinates and provide support to them to overcome the challenges.

The overall perceptions of selected agriculture officers in the banks on four dimensions of superiors' behaviour showed similar outcomes. The findings indicated a positive perception of different dimensions of superiors' behaviour among respondents, with

motivation standing out. While some variability existed in the perception, it was relatively consistent across the dimensions. The mean perception scores varied between 3.64 to 3.74 with overall perception of superiors' behaviour score as 3.69 with a coefficient of variation of about 22.50%. The findings indicated that the superiors in the study area were successful in fostering a supportive and motivating work environment in the bank. They were perceived as influential, and capable of creating confidence in their subordinates. However, there were areas that can be improved, such as motivation through rewards. Effective communication between superiors and subordinates was crucial. According to Mittal & Randhawa (2021), it was not possible to have good personal and professional relationships without effective information exchange. So, effective communication of information with coworkers/ colleagues was crucial and permanent challenge to the success of any organization. The findings of present study also suggests that the superiors had emphasised teamwork, collaboration, and inclusive decision-making, although there was room for improvement in involving bank's agriculture officers in the decision-making process and helping them to overcome the job-related problems. Further, the study indicated a positive perception of superiors' behaviour and their efforts to create a positive work environment in the banking sector, but there were areas that could be strengthened to enhance support and understanding for subordinates. Rao et al., (2021) mentioned four

different behavioural styles of a leader - a high task/low relationship behaviour, a high task/high relationship behaviour, a high relationship/low task behaviour, and a low relationship/low task behaviour following the managerial grid of Blake et al., (1962). According to their study, out of four styles following the situational leadership model. i.e., Telling, Selling, Participating and Delegating, professionals from the National Agricultural Research and Education System were found to have selling style of leadership followed by a telling style. Selling was viewed as trying to persuade on tasks and this still required much of the leader's time, but the focus now also includes developing a relationship with the employee spending more time listening and offering advice.

Comparative perceptions of groups of respondents

Table 2 represents index scores for various dimensions of superiors' behaviour perceived by bank employees (subordinates) across different experience groups. Whereas, Figure 1 illustrates the relative contribution of the dimensions on overall index scores as well as relative contributions of various dimensions of superiors' behaviour. The respondents with >5-10 years of experience in banking service perceived that their superiors had a relatively higher motivation index of 77.97. Therefore, the motivating ability of the superior was appreciated mostly by respondents with >5-10 years of experience followed by respondents with up to 5

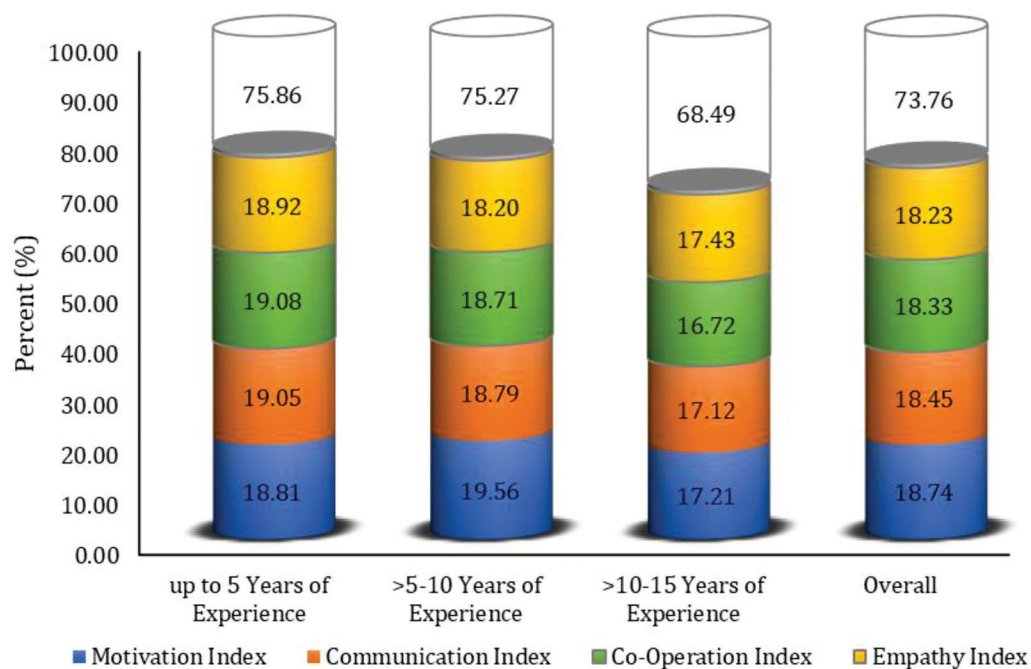
years of experience. Respondents' perception about the remaining three domains of superior' behaviour and overall superiors' behaviour was inversely proportional to their experience. The ability of superiors to motivate their subordinates was notably acknowledged by respondents who possessed more than 5-10 years of experience, closely trailed by respondents with up to 5 years of experience. Interestingly, as respondents' experience levels increased, their perceptions regarding the other three dimensions of superior behaviour viz. communication, cooperation, and empathy followed an inverse relationship, suggesting a potential decline in the perceived effectiveness of superiors' behaviour in these dimensions over extended periods of service. Similarly, the overall perception of superiors' behaviour exhibited a parallel trend. The impact of superiors' behaviour on employees lessens as respondents accumulate more experience. This nuanced pattern highlights the dynamic interplay between experience and perception of overall superiors' behaviour. It also emphasises the importance of maintaining consistent and effective superiors' behaviour in the dimensions of communication, cooperation, and empathy to counteract the potential decline in the performance of the subordinates over time.

It was evident from the study that, respondents across diverse experience groups, whether considered individually or collectively, share similar perceptions regarding the distinct characteristics of

Table 2. Indices with respect to different dimensions of superiors' behaviour across three groups of respondents

Domains	Work experience (Years)			Overall
	up to 5	>5-10	>10-15	
Motivation index (MI)	75.24	77.97	68.89	74.85
Communication index (CI)	76.21	74.89	68.53	73.71
Cooperation index (COI)	76.36	74.58	66.93	73.22
Empathy index (EI)	75.71	72.53	69.78	72.83
Superiors' behaviour index (SBI)	75.86	75.27	68.49	73.76

Figure 1. Overall superiors' behaviour and relative contributions of its dimensions



their superiors. This consistent pattern was evident in the nearly equivalent contributions of these four distinct behaviour dimensions to the overall perception of superiors' conduct (Figure 1). It could be observed that respondents from different experience groups individually, as well as together, had perceived those four distinct characteristics of superior had an almost similar contribution to the overall superiors' behaviour. The contribution ranged from 16.72 per cent to 19.56 per cent.

Test of significance of differential perceptions of respondents

To take a deeper look in the difference of perceptions among the groups of respondents the one-way ANOVA was performed. The findings of the analysis are tabulated in Table 3. It was suggested that, there were significant differences exist among the groups of bank officials (based on experience) in the perception of motivation (F=4.608; p=0.011), communication (F=3.014; p=0.052), cooperation (F=3.437; p= 0.034), and overall superiors' behaviour (F=3.120; p=0.047), while there was no significant difference in perceptions of regarding empathy domain of superiors' behaviour (F=1.395; p=0.251).In order to precisely determine

which pair of groups of respondents differed from each other, post hoc tests were conducted for the domains like motivation, communication, cooperation, and overall superiors' behaviour having significant F test statistics.

The post hoc tests revealed significant differences. As evident from Table 4, significant variations were observed in the motivation and cooperation domains. Specifically, there was a significant difference in perceptions between the groups of respondents with >5-10 years of experience and >10-15 years of experience (p=0.011) with respect to motivation domain. And in case of the cooperation domain, the significant difference was observed between respondents with up to 5 years of experience and the respondents with more than 10 years of experience (p=0.049). Additionally, a notable difference at 10% level of significance was observed for communication domain between two extreme experience categories of respondents (p=0.073). Regarding the overall superiors' behaviour, respondents with high experience showed a variation with the remaining two groups (p=0.083 and 0.089). Figure 2 indicates no significant differences in mean perception scores of three groups in terms of commonality in alphabets.

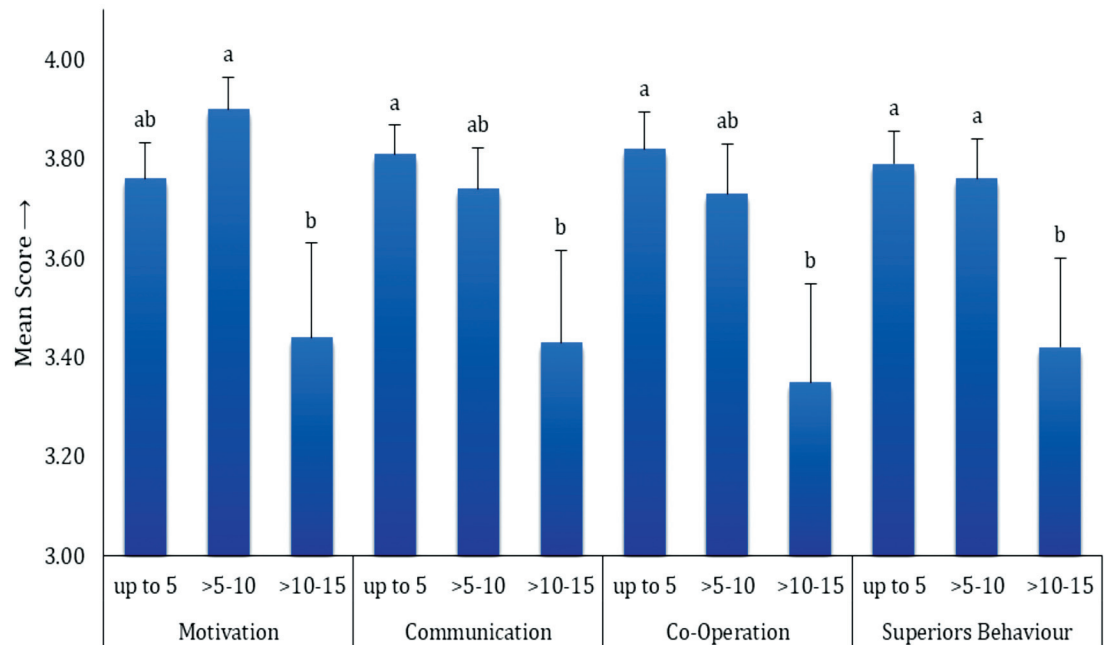
Table 3. The differences between the groups of respondents regarding perceptions of superiors' behaviour

Particulars		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Motivation	Between Groups	5.971	2	2.985	4.608	0.011
	Within Groups	114.678	177	0.648		
	Total	120.649	179			
Communication	Between Groups	4.166	2	2.083	3.014	0.052
	Within Groups	122.317	177	0.691		
	Total	126.482	179			
Co-operation	Between Groups	6.191	2	3.095	3.437	0.034
	Within Groups	159.417	177	0.901		
	Total	165.608	179			
Empathy	Between Groups	2.230	2	1.115	1.395	0.251
	Within Groups	141.532	177	0.800		
	Total	143.763	179			
Superiors behaviour	Between Groups	4.189	2	2.095	3.120	0.047
	Within Groups	118.844	177	0.671		
	Total	123.033	179			

Table 4. Post hoc tests depicting significant differences between the groups of respondents with respect to perceived domains and overall superiors' behaviour

Variable	Experience category (yrs.)		Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.	95% confidence interval	
	(I)	(J)				Lower bound	Upper bound
	Motivation	up to 5					
	up to 5	>10-15	0.319	0.161	0.144	-0.079	0.717
	>5-10	>10-15	0.455	0.150	0.011	0.084	0.826
Communication	up to 5	>5-10	0.066	0.145	0.901	-0.292	0.425
	up to 5	>10-15	0.384	0.166	0.073	-0.027	0.795
	>5-10	>10-15	0.318	0.155	0.126	-0.066	0.701
Co-operation	up to 5	>5-10	0.089	0.166	0.867	-0.321	0.498
	up to 5	>10-15	0.471	0.190	0.049	0.002	0.940
	>5-10	>10-15	0.382	0.177	0.100	-0.055	0.820
Superiors behaviour	up to 5	>5-10	0.030	0.143	0.979	-0.324	0.383
	up to 5	>10-15	0.368	0.164	0.083	-0.037	0.773
	>5-10	>10-15	0.339	0.153	0.089	-0.039	0.717

Figure 2. Mean perception scores of three groups of respondents regarding superiors' behaviour and its domains



Overall superiors' behaviour was perceived moderately with an index of 73.76 that was derived based on motivation, communication, cooperation, and empathy, each contributing to overall perception almost equally. Motivation by the superiors was valued maximum by the subordinates as most of the respondents appreciated the superiors' motivating nature (mean score 3.74). The relationship between supervisors and subordinates is crucial for organisational performance (Robins, 2005); in this context, a favourable perception of agriculture officers on superior's behaviour as revealed in the present study may influence the organisational effectiveness of the banks. Donaldson-Feilder et al., (2011) highlighted positive leadership as having a stimulating effect on the motivation and participation of employees. Communication ability of the superior is equally important in influencing subordinates' attitudes (Gatling et al., 2017; Swain et al., 2018; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018; Men, 2021) that is found favourably perceived by the bank's agriculture officers in the present study. Therefore, superiors in banks must establish a foundation of trust with their employees to foster a positive work environment and enhance employee satisfaction (Dutta & Sharma, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Superiors were successful in fostering a supportive and motivating work environment, exerting influence voluntarily and honestly, and creating confidence in subordinates in the public sector banks as perceived by the agriculture officers. Communication between superiors and subordinates was generally effective, with superiors actively engaging in providing work-related information and discussing office-related matters. The cooperative nature of superiors was also apparent, with an emphasis on teamwork and the involvement of subordinates in decision-making processes. Thus, it is worth concluding from the present study that the respondent agriculture officers working in the banks have been

working with motivating and supportive superiors exercising the participatory management behaviour that would have a facilitating effect in their performance to provide financial assistance to the farmers for improved farming. Therefore, policies should aim to cultivate positive relationships, support open communication, and provide incentives for collaboration to promote effective participatory management in the banking industry.

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