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The Use of Influence Tactics in Persuasion

HERMAN AGUINIS
Department of Psychology
University of Colorado at Denver

MITCHELL S. NESLER
MEGUMI HOSODA
JAMES T. TEDESCHI
Department of Psychology
University at Albany
State University of New York

ABSTRACT. American undergraduates ($N = 154$) were presented with vignettes in which a downward influence situation was described, together with conditions of (a) the types of jobs of the agent and target of the influence situation, (b) the role identities of the actors, and (c) the goal of the actor attempting to influence the target. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the hypothesis that the preference order for influence tactics would be invariant across situations (cf. Rule, Bisanz, & Kohn, 1985). The likelihood and relative degree to which the influence tactics were predicted to be used were similar across situations, providing support for the schema-based notion of a "persuade package."

INFLUENCE TACTICS have been the focus of recent investigations of social power used in organizational contexts (Case, Doisier, Murkison, & Keys, 1988; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Nesler, Aguinis, Quigley, & Tedeschi, 1993; Schriescheim & Hinkin, 1990; Tjosvold, Johnson, & Johnson, 1984; Yukl & Falbe, 1990, 1991). The main purpose of such research has been to create a taxonomy of influence tactics. For example, Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson developed a classification based on essays college students wrote on the topic "How I get my way," and Yukl and Falbe (1990) developed a ques-

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Address correspondence to Herman Aguinis, Department of Psychology, University of Colorado at Denver, Campus Box 173, P.O. Box 173364, Denver, CO 80217-3364. E-mail: HAGUINIS@CUDNVR.DENVER.COLORADO.EDU.

tionnaire, adding new tactics and objectives that had been overlooked by previous researchers.

A second goal of such research has been to examine whether people prefer certain types of influence tactics across different situations. The results have been mixed. Some researchers have reported that a number of situational factors influence whether a person will use a particular influence tactic. Ansari and Kapoor (1987) manipulated leadership style in a role-playing context and reported that this manipulation affected the type of influence tactics the participants chose. Mulder, de Jong, Koppelaar, and Verhage (1986) demonstrated that the choice of influence tactics depends on whether a situation is perceived as a crisis. Other researchers have argued that there is a relatively stable preference order for tactics across situations (Bisanz & Rule, 1989; Rule, Bisanz, & Kohn, 1985; Schank & Abelson, 1977).

Researchers who have proposed that the preference order for influence tactics is similar across situations have adopted a cognitive framework based on an information-processing approach. Rule et al. (1985) used Schank and Abelson's (1977) general concept of the *persuade package*, a small, standard set of methods (influence tactics) that leads to a particular goal (to persuade the target to behave in a particular way). The package can be defined as a schema, a mental framework about the social influence domain that directs the encoding, storage, and retrieval of information related to this domain (Graesser, 1981; Lachman, Lachman, & Butterfield, 1979). Schemata can be conceptualized as "packages of knowledge" (McClelland, Rumelhart, & Hinton, 1986) or "natural units" that are retrieved from memory in an all-or-none manner (Anderson, 1980). Rule et al. (1985) explained how the persuade package is embedded in a broader theoretical context of event understanding based on three assumptions: (a) the number of goals associated with a particular influence attempt is a small, finite set; (b) these goals are all linked to use of a small, standard set of methods; and (c) if these methods fail, additional methods will be tried. The main advantage for researchers of adopting such a framework is that the underlying assumptions are limited and well defined and thus are capable of being empirically tested.

In an empirical test of Schank and Abelson's (1977) persuade package, Rule et al. (1985) found a consistent preference order for influence tactics: asking, self-oriented methods, dyad-oriented methods, appeal to principles, negative tactics. Bisanz and Rule (1989) used the same grouping of tactics and found that the preference order was constant for women and men; hence, these researchers concluded that the relative probability of use of various influence tactics is a cognitive invariant and most likely a product of socialization.

Our main goal in the present study was to examine further the possibility of a schema-based persuade package. The existence of such a package would imply that the preference order for influence tactics is a cognitive invariant.

Method

Subjects

One hundred fifty-four undergraduate students (74 men, 80 women) from a northeastern state university participated in the study as partial fulfillment of their course requirements.

Procedure

The subjects were administered a questionnaire in mass testing sessions. The first page of the questionnaire included the instructions and examples of each of the four types of influence tactics, adapted from Schriesheim and Hinkin (1990) (ingratiation, assertiveness, rationality, and exchange). The subjects were asked to read three scenarios (the order of presentation was randomized) and to rate the degree to which they believed the source would use each of the four tactics.

Vignettes[1]. One setting was described in each of the three scenarios in which a supervisor (influencing agent) wanted a subordinate (target of the influence attempt) to perform a task. The three settings differed in terms of (a) the type of job described (i.e., a public relations department, a manufacturing plant, and a landscaping company), (b) the role identities of the actors (i.e., different occupations and levels of education), and (c) the goal of the influencing agent (i.e., write a report, mow the lawn, paint a number of objects). Each situation was described up to the point when the influencing agent in the story was about to use an influence tactic or take an action to achieve his goal. The subjects were then presented with the dependent variables (their ratings of the degree to which each of the four influence tactics would be used by the superior to influence his subordinate's behavior) and asked to respond to the question "Given this situation, what is the likelihood that [name of influencing agent] will use each of the following tactics to get [name of target of influence attempt] to comply?"

[1] The present scenarios were part of a larger study in which two other factors were manipulated (Time Pressure, with two levels; and Audience, with four levels). The manipulations of these factors were not relevant to the present study, and we collapsed across these factors because they yielded nonsignificant effects on the use of the influence tactics.

A multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA), using each of the two factors as independent variables and the four tactics as dependent variables, yielded nonsignificant results. Wilks's lambda for Time Pressure was .88, Rao's $F(12, 136) = 1.58$, $p > .10$; and Wilks's lambda for Audience was .76, Rao's $F(36, 402.55) = 1.07$, $p > .36$, indicating that the overall use of the four tactics did not vary across the two levels of Time Pressure and the four levels of Audience.

The subjects indicated their answers on scales that ranged from *very likely* (1) to *very unlikely* (7)[2].

Results

The rank ordering of the means for each of the four influence tactics was the same in each scenario. In the public relations department scenario, rationality was ranked as the most likely to be used (M = 2.56), followed by ingratiation (M = 3.59), assertiveness (M = 4.34), and exchange (M = 4.83). The same rank ordering was found for the manufacturing plant scenario (Ms = 2.85, 3.58, 4.36, and 4.69, respectively), and the landscaping company scenario (Ms = 2.88, 3.68, 4.51, and 5.13, respectively). The standard deviations ranged from 1.33 to 2.02. The means indicate that the preference order for the four strategies was consistent across the three situations.

In the model presented in Figure 1 we attempted to account for the covariance matrix among the 12 measures (four tactics in each of the three scenarios) by postulating four underlying factors, or latent variables, each of which corresponds to one type of influence tactic. We evaluated the fit of the model with LISREL VII (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989), using the sample correlation matrix as input and a maximum likelihood solution. Jöreskog and Sörbom recommend three indices to judge the fit of the structural model to the data, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the chi-square, and the root mean square residual (RMSR). The GFI was .852, and the RMSR for the predicted minus observed correlation matrices was .085, suggesting a relatively good model fit. We also computed the comparative-fit index (CFI = .73) (Bentler, 1990), which likewise suggested a relatively good model fit. The overall chi-square test of the model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(48, N = 154) = 184.88, p < .001$, but one can, nevertheless, still be confident of the relatively good fit of the model. Recent Monte Carlo simulations have indicated that the chi-square test can yield statistically significant results, even with a relatively good model fit, mainly because of the statistical power of large sample sizes (Bollen, 1990; Marsh, Balla, & McDonald, 1988). The parameter estimates for the structural coefficients are also presented in Figure 1. Standardized coefficients appear on each path. All paths from the latent to the observed measures were statistically significant at the p = .05 level (T > 2.00, Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989). The estimated correlations among the latent variables are also reported. The residuals for each of the observed measures were generally low, indicating that the influence tactics were consistently used across scenarios.

Figure 2 is a model in which it is hypothesized that the preference order for the influence tactics is dependent on the context in which the tactics are presented.

[2] Copies of the scenarios and the examples of the influence tactics that were presented to the participants can be obtained from the senior author.

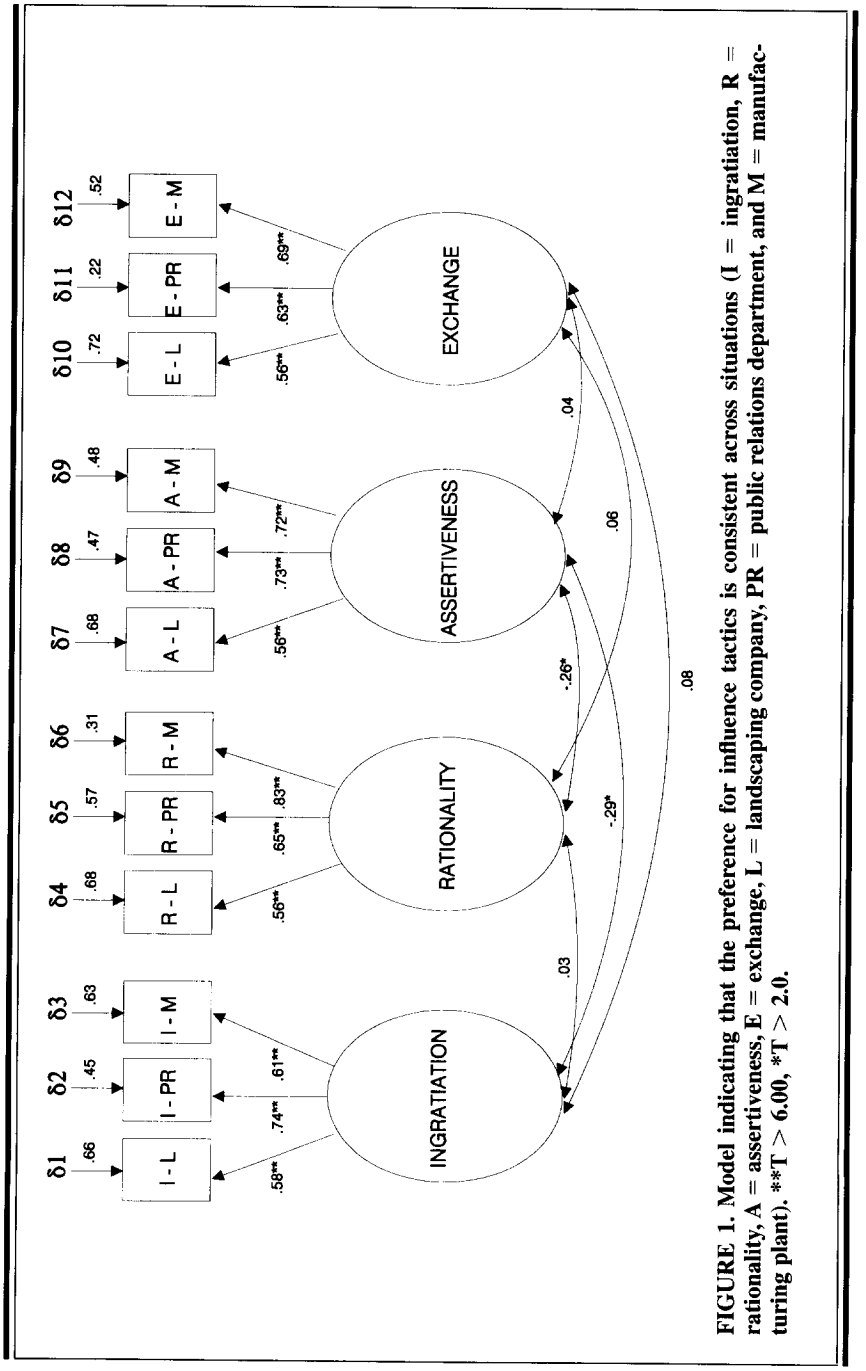

FIGURE 1. Model indicating that the preference for influence tactics is consistent across situations (I = ingratiation, R = rationality, A = assertiveness, E = exchange, L = landscaping company, PR = public relations department, and M = manufacturing plant). **T > 6.00, *T > 2.0.

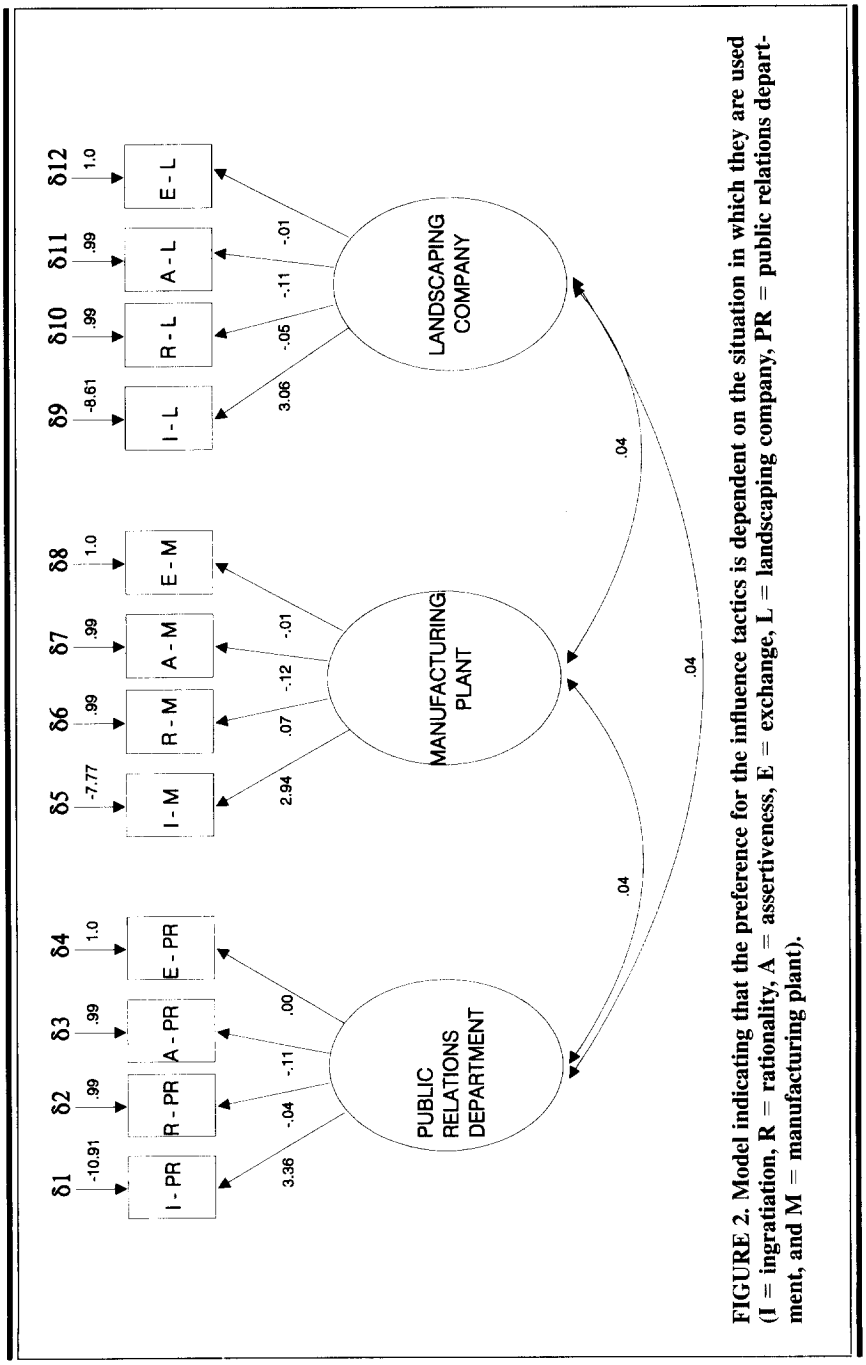

FIGURE 2. Model indicating that the preference for the influence tactics is dependent on the situation in which they are used (I = ingratiation, R = rationality, A = assertiveness, E = exchange, L = landscaping company, PR = public relations department, and M = manufacturing plant).

In this model we attempted to account for the covariance matrix among the 12 observed variables by postulating three underlying factors, or latent variables, one corresponding to each job situation. As with the model in Figure 1, we evaluated the fit of this model using LISREL VII and the sample correlation matrix as input. The GFI was .703, and the RMSR was .180. The CFI was .27. The overall chi-square test of the model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(51, N = 154) = 416.80$, $p < .001$. The standardized path coefficients appear on each path. The estimated correlations among the latent variables are also reported. None of the paths between the latent and the observed variables and for the correlations among the latent variables were statistically significant at the $p = .05$ level. Figure 2 suggests that because this hypothesized structural model indicated a very poor fit, the theta delta matrix was not positive definite, deriving in proportion of variance not accounted for larger than 1.0 for 3 of the 12 observed variables (I-PR, I-M, and I-L).

The goodness-of-fit estimates for the models indicate that the model in Figure 1 is superior to that in Figure 2 (i.e., $GFI_{Model\ 1} - GFI_{Model\ 2} = .15$). As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), we formally tested the hypothesis that the incremental goodness-of-fit of Model 1 over Model 2 is statistically significant. Because the models have a nested relationship, we could compare the chi-squares. The chi-square difference was $\chi^2(3, N = 154) = 231.92, p < .001$, indicating that the model in Figure 1 has a statistically significant incremental goodness-of-fit over the model in Figure 2.

Discussion

The results indicate that the subjects' preference order for the four types of influence tactics was invariant across the three job situations, providing more evidence for the persuade package (Bisanz & Rule, 1989; Rule et al., 1985; Schank & Abelson, 1977). Apparently, the subjects' decision about which tactic to choose was guided by a general schema that was associated with influence situations.

As indicated by the mean ratings of the four influence tactics, the rank order of the likelihood that each of the tactics would be used was identical across the three situations. The subjects predicted that they would be most likely to use rational appeals, somewhat less likely to use ingratiation, even less likely to use assertiveness, and least likely to use exchange. These results are consistent with the findings that have been reported by previous researchers. A close examination of how our tactics and those of Rule and her colleagues were defined for participants indicates that there is isomorphism. Rationality is "present information" (the individual presents facts in an attempt to obtain cooperation), ingratiation is "butter-up" (the individual attempts to make the target feel wonderful or important in an attempt to obtain cooperation), assertiveness is "threaten" or "force" (included in the larger "negative" category), and exchange is "bargain object of favor" (the individual offers a highly desired reward, such as money or a favor, in exchange for cooperation).

The order of preference of tactics reported by Rule et al. (1985) and by Bisanz and Rule (1989) is very similar to the order that was preferred by the participants in the present study. The only discrepancy is in the order that was chosen for assertiveness and exchange, which were ranked third and fourth by the participants in the present study. Rule and her colleagues reported an inverse order. This discrepancy is not major, however; other authors (Peirce, Pruitt, & Czaja, 1991) have also reported that there is a relatively stable preference order for influence tactics and that struggle tactics (e.g., demands) are used as a last or a next-to-last resort. In addition, the rank order of the likelihoods that the four tactics would be used was identical to that reported by Yukl and Falbe (1990, Table 7, p. 139) for the use of influence tactics with a subordinate (downward direction) in a different situation. It should be noted, however, that the persuade package may be culturally determined (cf. Rule et al., 1985). Thus, the rank ordering that is typically obtained in research conducted in the United States may not be generalizable to other countries. For example, in some authoritarian societies "ingratiation" might receive a higher rating[3].

In general, the present findings provide further evidence for the existence of a persuade package. The present findings extend the application of schemata from organizational areas, such as performance appraisal (Borman, 1987; Feldman, 1981), power perceptions (Aguinis, Nesler, Quigley, & Tedeschi, in press), and leadership perceptions (Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984), to the tactics chosen by individuals who are faced with an influence situation.

The evidence for a persuade package has noteworthy implications. First, a positive implication is that the persuade package could be retrieved in an automatic (Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977), or implicit fashion without investing too many cognitive resources, thus allowing for efficient information processing. Second, in terms of connectionist cognitive architectures (Estes, 1988; Gluck & Bower, 1988; Rumelhart, Smolensky, McClelland, & Hinton, 1986) the persuade package consists of a constraint network that is implicitly activated in an influence situation. Consequently, the second-ranked tactic in the package will be chosen only if it is impossible to use the first one, the third-ranked tactic will be chosen only if it is impossible to use the second one, and so forth. There would be negative consequences for society and for organizations if only the last or next-to-last tactic (force) was available. Pruitt, Mikolic, Peirce, and Keating (1993) report that a lack of other tactics might drastically increase the likelihood of aggression. Third, once the schema has been formed and has become implicit, the persuade package could be used without being controlled and with little or no awareness. As mentioned previously, however, a potential negative implication is that if the tactic of force is given priority it will be used frequently.

[3] We thank an anonymous reviewer for making this suggestion.

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