

Relational Considerations in the Use of Influence Tactics¹

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It is proposed that the existing relationship between the influencing agent and the target of influence plays a central role in the choice of using hard and soft influence tactics. In a field study, 3 key aspects of the relation between agent and target were examined, and the results generally supported our hypotheses. First, the more unfairly people felt they were treated, the more often they wielded influence, especially using harder influence tactics. Second, the better the influencing agent liked the target, the relatively less often he or she used hard tactics. Finally, the more the influencing agent felt dependent upon the target, the fewer influence tactics, both hard and soft, were used. The discussion focuses on both the practical and theoretical implications of these findings.

You want to dine out with someone, but you disagree about which restaurant it is going to be; someone in the department must do an unpleasant job, but you want to make sure that in any case it will not be you; you want to make new work arrangements, but you are afraid your boss will not agree; you want to get your partner to come with you to that tedious family party, but you suspect that he or she does not want to come along. These are all daily occurrences in which influencing someone else in order to get something done plays a central role, and they illustrate that social influence is a crucial element in most interpersonal contact.

In the present research, we concentrate on an aspect of social influence that has been given relatively little attention in the literature: exerting influence (as opposed to being influenced). In this respect, it is of interest to know both *when* people are likely to wield influence and *how* they go about it when they have

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decided to do so. The present study focuses on both of these aspects of the use of influence, but foremost on the latter: the influence tactics employed. Specifically, the relationship between the types of influence tactics used and relational considerations, such as the degree to which one feels fairly treated by the person to be influenced (the target), the degree to which one likes the target, and the degree to which one feels dependent on the target, is studied.

When people want to get their way, they can proceed in various manners. They can, in other words, use various influence tactics. Interpersonal influence tactics can be defined as actions that people take to change the attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors of target individuals (Barry & Shapiro, 1992; Kipnis, 1984). Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980) are some of the first to have tried to classify the manners in which influence can be exerted, and they arrived at a number of categories of influence tactics. These categories of influence tactics are: (a) *assertiveness*: confronting the target in a direct or intimidating and emotionally charged manner; (b) *rationality*: presenting arguments and information to the target; (c) *ingratiation*: putting the target in a good humor or making the target think positively about oneself; (d) *exchange*: referring to reciprocation of material or immaterial (like friendship) goods; (e) *coalition*: seeking support with superiors (e.g., upward appeal) or peers; (f) *blocking*: hindering the target in carrying out specific actions; and (g) *sanctions*: threatening the target with or carrying out administrative compulsory measures (Guerin, 1995; Kipnis et al., 1980). Other researchers (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990; Yukl & Falbe, 1990), who after Kipnis and colleagues committed themselves to the field of classification of influence tactics, arrived at more or less similar categories (Guerin, 1995). An exception is Cialdini (1993), who discussed a somewhat different listing of influence behavior; this, however, may well be due to the fact that Cialdini only concentrates on tactics that produce a more or less automatic, thoughtless compliance from the target.

Some of the tactics described in the previous section allow the target more freedom than do other tactics in deciding whether or not to accept the wielded influence. This difference between influence tactics has led some researchers (Bruins, 1995; Kipnis, 1984; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988) to advocate the usefulness and importance of regrouping the influence tactics (according to their strength) into hard and soft tactics. The strength of influence tactics can be defined as "the extent to which using particular influence tactics takes control over the situation and the target, and does not allow the target any latitude in choosing whether to comply" (Tepper, Brown, & Hunt, 1993, p. 1906). As such, the distinction between hard and soft influence tactics reflects the difference in forcefulness of influence tactics. Generally, soft tactics can be considered to be less controlling and less aggressive than their harder, more forceful counterparts. If we think back to the aforementioned situation about the upcoming boring family party, an example of a softer tactic is to shower one's partner with sweet words prior to

asking him or her to come along (ingratiation), whereas an example of a harder variety is not to say anything to one's partner or to pretend not to hear one's partner until he or she gives in (blocking; see the Strength of Influence Tactics section for a more complete classification of hard and soft tactics).

As strength seems to be of substantial importance to distinguish between the existing tactics (Bruins, 1995; Kipnis, 1984), it would be especially insightful to focus on factors that influence the choice of hard or soft influence tactics. First, however, we may formulate a more general hypothesis regarding the use of harder relative to softer tactics. As may be clear from the examples, the use of hard influence tactics will be experienced as disagreeable by the target of influence. The use of harder tactics is experienced as less friendly and less socially desirable than the use of the softer varieties that allow the other more freedom (Raven, 1992; Yukl & Tracy, 1992). The use of hard influence tactics will therefore usually put more strain on the relationship between influencing agent and target than the use of soft tactics. Assuming that people generally have a preference for harmonious relationships, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 1. In general, hard influence tactics will be deployed less often than soft influence tactics.

Thus, as compared with hard influence tactics, soft tactics may be utilized without much reluctance or hesitation. Whereas people may, whenever they want to get something done, employ soft tactics more or less by default, the decision whether or not to use hard tactics will be contingent on considerations regarding the side effects of the use of hard tactics. This also means that in some situations people will be more likely to use hard tactics than in others. What considerations then will engender or inhibit the use of hard tactics? We propose that, since the use of hard influence tactics may have especially strong effects on the relationship between the agent and the target of influence, relational considerations will be a major determinant of the relative preference for hard tactics.

We proposed that, in general, a wish to maintain a good relationship will restrain the use of hard influence tactics. Roughly speaking, people may strive to maintain good relationships for two reasons. First, people may be intrinsically motivated to do so because they value the relationship in its own right (e.g., in the case of a friendship). Second, people may be extrinsically motivated to maintain a good relationship not because of the interpersonal relationship in itself, but because they are dependent on outcomes that are contingent on the quality of the relationship (for more information about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, see Deci & Ryan, 1985; Pelletier & Vallerand, 1996). That is, people may be motivated to maintain a good relationship because they cannot afford to damage the relationship (e.g., as may be the case with a subordinate's relationship with a supervisor). Will relational considerations always inhibit the use of hard tactics?

On the contrary, we propose that under certain conditions, relational considerations may evoke the use of harder tactics (e.g., Tedeschi, 1993). Specifically, harder tactics may be used to channel negative emotions and to communicate dissatisfaction with the course of affairs within the relationship. In the present study, we test specific predictions derived from these more general propositions, focusing on typical exemplars of these three types of considerations.

To start with the latter proposition, the use of hard tactics may be evoked if one feels one is treated badly by the potential target of influence. One of the key aspects of how people feel treated is the fairness they experience in their treatment. Although no direct empirical test of the relationship between the experienced fairness of treatment and the influence tactics used has as yet been undertaken, we can draw from social justice research to formulate hypotheses about this relationship. Literature on social justice (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992) postulates that unfair treatment evokes negative emotions, such as frustration and disappointment, creating the need to restore the negatively tipped balance in some way or other (so that the injustice might be repaired). Actions undertaken to redress a negatively tipped equilibrium will often imply influencing others. Thus, we predict:

Hypothesis 2. The more unfairly people feel treated, the more influence they will exert.

Of more interest to the present discussion, however, is the relationship between perceived fairness of treatment and the preference for soft and hard influence tactics. We propose that unfair treatment by the target may especially engender the use of harder tactics because by using hard tactics, the influencing agent can express negative emotions and dissatisfaction with the course of affairs within the relationship. This idea is corroborated by social justice research showing that the less justly people feel treated, the less they are willing to adjust to prevailing behavioral conventions. Responses to unfair treatment are, for example, stealing, disobedience, sabotage, aggression, or absenteeism from work (Modde, Vermunt, & Wiegman, 1995; Rabbie & Lodewijkx, 1995; for an overview, see also Rutte & Messick, 1995, and Lind & Tyler, 1988). These findings suggest that, in accordance with our more general theoretical framework, a treatment that is experienced as more unfair will be associated with more frequent use of the harder influence tactics. More formally stated:

Hypothesis 3. Experienced fair treatment will be more negatively related to the use of hard tactics than to the use of soft tactics.

In light of the proposition that people may be intrinsically motivated to maintain a good relationship and that this will restrain the use of hard influence tactics,

it would seem important to take into consideration how much the influencing agent likes the target. All other things being equal, people may be assumed to put more value on a relationship with people they like more than on a relationship with people they like less. Considering that the use of hard tactics will be experienced as disagreeable, it may be expected that the extent to which an influencing agent likes the target will have its effect especially on the use of hard tactics. Indeed, Michener and Schwertfeger (1972) and Kipnis (1976) report that hard tactics were invoked less often when the target of influence was liked by the influencing agent. In concordance with these findings, we expect that the better the agent likes the target, the relatively less he or she will use hard influence tactics.

Hypothesis 4. There will be a stronger negative relationship between liking and the use of hard influence tactics than between liking and the use of soft influence tactics.

As stated earlier, people may not only be intrinsically motivated to maintain a good relationship with the target of influence, but they may also be extrinsically motivated to do so because they rely on outcomes that are contingent on the quality of the relationship. The more an individual depends on someone to obtain appreciated outcomes, the less he or she can afford to affront the other (cf. Pruitt & Carnavale, 1993; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Thus, higher perceived dependency makes it more problematic to afford oneself the luxury of using tactics that will easily result in affronting the target (cf. "Don't bite the hand that feeds you").

Hypothesis 5. There will be a stronger negative relationship between perceived dependency and the use of hard influence tactics than between perceived dependency and the use of soft influence tactics.

Method

Respondents and Procedure

In order to avoid having the survey carried out in a research population in which respondents only rarely feel unfairly treated or only seldom consider their target persons as unpleasant, we opted to investigate a representative sample of detainees in police stations in the Netherlands as part of a larger survey of detainees. In total, 116 detainees in five major police stations in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, The Hague, Leiden, Rotterdam, and Utrecht) were interviewed by trained interviewers using the questionnaire described in the following section. The majority of the participants were male (107, 92%); their average age was 29 years. All detainees who were present in the police stations' cellblocks during the

survey (3 days in 3 consecutive weeks) and who had sufficient command of Dutch and who were not under the influence of alcohol or drugs were asked to participate in the survey. When people were willing to participate (approximately 95% of the detainees approached), they were brought to a visitors' room in the compound by a police employee providing custodial care (hereafter referred to as *guard*), where—in the absence of third parties—they were interviewed. The respondents were assured of anonymity and confidential handling of the information they had provided. After completing the questionnaire, the respondents were returned to their cells.

Measures

Use of influence tactics. Six scales were designed (based on the questionnaire by Kipnis et al., 1980) to measure the frequency of the use of the following influence tactics: assertiveness (5 items, $\alpha = .63$), rationality (4 items, $\alpha = .68$), ingratiation (3 items, $\alpha = .60$), exchange (4 items, $\alpha = .67$), coalition (3 items, $\alpha = .60$), and blocking (4 items, $\alpha = .68$). The alphas of these scales are reasonably high and are comparable to the ones obtained by Kipnis et al. (1980) and Yukl and Falbe (1990).³ Following the sentence "If I want something out of a guard, then . . .," items were offered such as "I keep nagging until I have my way" (assertiveness); "I state the reason for my request" (rationality); "I make him feel very important" (ingratiation); "I promise to keep quiet for the time being and not ask for anything more if my request is granted" (exchange); "I call in the help of the head guard, the station sergeant, or social workers to strengthen my request" (coalition); and "I am deliberately slow when asked to do something, until I have my way" (blocking). Respondents used 5-point scales ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*) to indicate how often they used these means of influence. To determine the average frequency of influence attempts, we created the *total* scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*), which consists of the unweighted average of the measures for the use of the six influence tactics. Because the "sanction" tactic, as defined by Kipnis et al. (1980), does not apply to our sample (this tactic's definition is rather specific to business settings), we did not include this tactic in our study.

³The factor analysis yielded five interpretable factors. These factors accounted for a considerable percentage of the total item variance: 53.2%. Factor analysis revealed that assertiveness, blocking, rationality, ingratiation, and exchange are distinct forms of influence behavior. One additional factor is not discussed here since it contained only one item. As in the Kipnis et al. (1980) study, coalition did not emerge directly as a distinct tactic, but following Kipnis et al., we decided to retain this factor for heuristic purposes and to enhance the comparability with other studies using the same typology of influence tactics. In the same vein, three items that did not load exclusively on the intended factor were nevertheless retained as indicators of these factors to increase scale reliability and interstudy comparability. However, when scales are constructed exclusively on the basis of the results of the factor analysis (which leads to the exclusion of the coalition tactic and of the three items discussed earlier) a pattern of results similar to the one reported here is observed.

Strength of influence tactics. Eighteen independent respondents participated in a preliminary study designed to assess the strength of the influence tactics. The instructions for this preliminary questionnaire study stated that when people want to get something done, they can proceed in various manners, and that it is conceivable that the respondents consider the one influence attempt to be harder or more unfriendly than the other. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*soft*) to 7 (*hard*) how hard they considered each of the influence attempts described in the previous section to be. Mean scores of 5.72, 5.68, and 5.59 were obtained for assertiveness, blocking, and coalition, respectively, indicating that they may be considered hard tactics. The rationality, ingratiation, and exchange tactics scored 3.35, 2.98, and 3.90, respectively, and therefore can be regarded as softer tactics. The difference in perceived hardness between these two groups (the hard tactics group and the soft tactics group) was significant, $t(17) = 13.78, p < .001$. The items we used in our study were also rated for friendliness (1 = *unfriendly*, 7 = *friendly*). The assertiveness, blocking, and coalition tactics were regarded as unfriendly ($M_s = 2.10, 1.81, \text{ and } 2.44$, respectively), whereas the rationality, ingratiation, and exchange tactics were seen as relatively friendly ($M_s = 5.38, 4.65, \text{ and } 4.06$, respectively). Again, there was a significant difference between these two groups, $t(17) = 11.37, p < .001$. On the basis of these results, a division into hard and soft tactics was made. As the measure for the frequency of the use of hard tactics, we took the unweighted average use of the assertiveness, blocking, and coalition tactics (on a scale ranging from 1 [*never*] to 5 [*very often*]). In the same vein, the frequency of the use of soft tactics is represented by the unweighted average use of the rationality, ingratiation, and exchange tactics (on a scale ranging from 1 [*never*] to 5 [*very often*]).

In a recent study by Farmer, Maslyn, Fedor, and Goodman (1997), a sample of 225 employees was used in order to establish whether the tactics of assertiveness, rationality, coalition, upward appeal, ingratiation, and exchange reflected a hard, soft, or rational strategy. Farmer et al. used second-order factor analysis in LISREL VII to assess the fit of several models. Based on theory and their results, a best-fit model was estimated. Although Farmer et al. did not investigate blocking and considered rationality to be a rational strategy, their results, were basically the same as ours: In concordance with our results they categorized assertiveness and coalition as hard influence tactics, and ingratiation and exchange as soft tactics. Therefore, the results of their study bolster confidence in the conclusions of our own preliminary study.

Experienced fairness of treatment. This was measured by the item "How fairly or unfairly do you think the guards treat you?" The responses ranged from 1 (*very unfair*) to 5 (*very fair*; $M = 3.35, SD = 1.12$).

Extent to which target persons were liked. This was measured by the item "If you consider the guards, to what extent do you like the guards?" The responses

Table 1

Means, Use of Influence Tactics, and Correlations of Influence Tactics With Fairness, Likability, and Dependency

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Fairness	Likability	Dependency
Assertiveness	2.35 _b	0.89	-.42***	-.29**	-.25**
Blocking	1.59 _c	0.83	-.24**	-.25**	-.25**
Coalition	1.77 _c	0.90	-.21	-.03	-.23**
Exchange	1.87 _c	0.98	-.27**	-.02	-.40***
Rationality	3.65 _a	1.06	-.01	-.09	-.04
Ingratiation	2.39 _b	1.21	-.21	-.02	-.19
Total	2.28	0.69	-.33***	-.14	-.33***
Hard	1.91	0.69	-.38***	-.24**	-.31***
Soft	2.64	0.83	-.22	-.04	-.28**

Note. Means for assertiveness to ingratiation that do not have a common subscript differ significantly ($p < .05$ by t test).

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

ranged from 1 (*do not like them at all*) to 5 (*like them very much*; $M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.77$).

Experienced dependency. This was measured by a scale consisting of five items ($\alpha = .71$). On 5-point scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), the respondents could indicate how much they agreed with statements such as "For everything here I want to have or want to do, I fully depend on others" ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.80$, on a 1-to-5 scale, in which 1 represents a low degree of dependency and 5 a high degree of dependency).

Results

As can be seen in Table 1, the rationality tactic was used most often by respondents. This finding is in accordance with research findings in industrial organizations (e.g., Farmer et al., 1997). Furthermore, results show that hard tactics were used less often than soft tactics, as predicted in Hypothesis 1, $t(102) = 10.83$, $p < .001$.

The total frequency of influence attempts was negatively correlated with the experienced fairness of treatment (Table 1). This means, as predicted in Hypothesis 2, that the less fairly people feel treated, the more they make use of their possibilities to exert influence. In addition, there was a significant relationship

between experienced dependency and the total amount of influence wielded (Table 1), indicating that the more the agents felt dependent on the target, the less likely they were to wield influence.

To test Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5, we separately tested the differences between the correlations of the use of hard tactics with experienced fairness, likability, and dependency against the correlations of the use of soft tactics with these same three variables,⁴ using *t* tests for dependent correlations (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The relationship between the use of hard tactics and the experienced fairness of treatment proved to be significantly stronger than the relationship between the use of soft tactics and the experienced fairness of treatment, $t(100) = 1.98, p < .05$, one-tailed (cf. Hypothesis 3). This indicates that when the treatment is experienced as being less fair, especially hard tactics are used more often. Also in accordance with the hypotheses, the relationship between the use of hard tactics and the extent to which target persons are liked proved significantly stronger than the relationship between the use of soft tactics and the extent to which targets are liked, $t(99) = 2.38, p < .001$, one-tailed (cf. Hypothesis 4). This result thus shows that the less the target persons were liked, the more use was made of hard tactics. The difference between the correlations of experienced dependency and the use of hard tactics on the one hand and experienced dependency and the use of soft tactics on the other proved to be nonsignificant, $t(100) < 1, ns$ (contrary to Hypothesis 5).

As mentioned previously, the more the treatment is experienced as unfair, the more often influence exertion efforts are undertaken. As can be seen from Table 1, this seems due mainly to the association of fairness of treatment with the use of assertiveness, blocking, and exchange. Also, it seems that the relationship between experienced dependency and the exertion of influence can be attributed specifically to the correlations between the use of the hard assertiveness, blocking, and coalition tactics. The fact that experienced dependency has a relationship with the soft tactics seems to be caused primarily by the correlation with exchange. The extent to which target persons are liked proves to be significantly correlated only to the assertiveness and blocking tactics.

Finally, to determine the unique contributions of experienced fairness of treatment, the extent to which targets were liked, and experienced dependency in determining the use of hard and soft influence tactics, a multivariate regression analysis was carried out. The use of hard and soft tactics served as criterion variables, and the experienced fairness of treatment, the extent to which targets were liked, and the experienced dependency served as predictor variables (Table 2). Together, the predictors explained 28% of the variance in the use of hard tactics,

⁴We tested our hypotheses using separate measures of the frequency with which hard and soft tactics were used. Additional analyses indicated that the use of alternative measures, like the ratio of hard to soft tactics, results in the same conclusions as the analysis reported here.

Table 2

Multivariate Regression Analysis

		β	t	R^2
Hard tactics	Fairness	-0.31	-3.47***	.28*
	Likability	-0.23	-2.59*	
	Dependency	-0.34	-3.82***	
Soft tactics	Fairness	-0.19	-1.94	.12**
	Likability	-0.05	-0.53	
	Dependency	-0.28	-2.92**	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

$F(3, 98) = 12.48, p < .001$. Moreover, this analysis showed that the three relational variables each provide a unique contribution to predicting the use of hard tactics. In contrast, the predictors explained just 12% of the variance in the use of soft tactics, $F(3, 98) = 4.63, p < .005$, and only experienced dependency was a significant predictor of the use of soft tactics.

Discussion

The results of this study strongly support the proposition that the relationship between influencing agent and influence target plays a central role in the decision to exert influence and in the choice of hard versus soft tactics. Indeed, relational considerations can be regarded as important social determinants of the use of influence tactics. So far, a substantial number of the studies on influence tactics were concerned mainly with the description and classification of the tactics used. Although some research aimed at identifying antecedents of influence tactic use has been undertaken, mainly focusing on personal features and specific task objectives (Grams & Rogers, 1990; Raven, 1992; Tepper et al., 1993; Veccio & Sussmann, 1991; Yukl, Guinan, & Sottolano, 1995), we still know relatively little about the determinants of the use of influence tactics, and with this study we hope to have added some knowledge about the factors that influence the use of hard and soft tactics.

We found, in accordance with both our expectations and previous research (e.g., Aguinis, Nesler, Hosoda, & Tedeschi, 1994; Rule, Bisanz, & Kohn, 1985; Yukl & Falbe, 1990), that, in general, individuals proved to make less use of the relatively unfriendly and socially undesirable hard tactics than of the softer tactics. Furthermore, the hypothesis based on the idea that unfair treatment evokes action, which calls for exerting influence, proved to be supported: People wielded

influence more often as they felt treated more unfairly. Also, this relationship proved to be stronger for the use of hard tactics than for the use of soft tactics, corroborating our more general proposition that, under certain conditions, relational considerations may evoke (instead of restrain) the use of harder tactics. Relatively more hard tactics were used as the treatment was experienced as being more unfair, which suggests that harder tactics may well be used to communicate dissatisfaction with the course of affairs within the relationship. In addition, this finding corroborates the more general proposition that unfair treatment may result in a disregard for behavioral conventions (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Rutte & Messick, 1995). Moreover, results of the present study indicate that the better the target persons were liked, the fewer hard tactics were used, which implies that respondents were not willing to jeopardize a good relationship by using an unfriendly and coercive manner of influence (cf. Kipnis, 1976; Michener & Schwertfeger, 1972).

We proposed that an influencing agent may also be extrinsically motivated to maintain an agreeable relationship with the target and that this will also affect the use of hard and soft influence tactics. Indeed, the dependency structure between potential influencing agent and target proved to be related to how people deal with their possibilities to exert influence. As expected, we found that the more strongly people felt themselves to be dependent on the target of influence, the less they used hard tactics. Unexpectedly, though, this relationship turned out to not be significantly smaller with regard to the use of the softer tactics. How can we interpret this finding? Taking a look at Table 1, one can see that the relationship between experienced dependency and soft tactics seems to be caused primarily by the strongly negative correlation between dependency and exchange. Of course, using the exchange tactic is worthwhile only if one has the feeling that one has something to offer the other party. Presumably, a strong feeling of dependency increases the feeling that one does not have anything of value to offer the other party in exchange. Moreover, it should be mentioned that the respondents in our research population felt highly dependent on the targets ($M = 4.17$ on a 1-to-5 scale), which is not very surprising since detainees depend on others for their food, drinks, contacts with a doctor or lawyer, and so forth. Thus, in a sense, we have examined only those individuals who are on the dependent side of a dependent-independent continuum. These strong feelings of dependency may lead to such strong fears of doing anything wrong that one may think that one cannot even allow oneself the use of soft tactics. Actually, similar behavior could also be noticed in the Stanford prison experiment by Zimbardo (1973). In this experiment, the "prisoners" in a very dependent situation changed into languid individuals who tried to yield little influence (not even seizing the opportunity to withdraw from the experiment). All in all, we suggest that in order to obtain a better insight into the relationship between experienced dependency and the choice between hard or soft influence tactics, further research should cover a wider area of the dependent-independent continuum.

Two aspects of the present study, the fact that behaviors were assessed by self-reports and the fact that it is correlational in nature, warrant some caution in basing conclusions on the present results. In this regard, it is important to note that recent experimental studies assessing actual behavior show that relational aspects such as the competitive versus cooperative nature of the relationship (van Knippenberg & Wilke, 1998) and the expectancy of a continued relationship with the target (van Knippenberg, 1997) affect the use and choice of influence tactics, thus strengthening us in our more general conclusion that relational considerations affect the use of hard and soft tactics.

Aside from enlarging our insights into the determinants of the use of influence tactics, the present findings may also have some practical implications for the prevention of conflict in interpersonal relationships. We found that the more unfairly people feel they are treated, the harder the influence tactics they use. The use of hard tactics is, however, not likely to improve the relationship between agent and target. Moreover, the target may find the hard tactics that are used to influence him or her rather objectionable and may react in a similar unfriendly fashion. Eventually, target and agent may find themselves in a negative conflict spiral, which could be detrimental to both parties' interests and well-being (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; Tedeschi, 1993). The results of this study suggest that in order to avoid such deterioration in a relationship, it would be helpful if people would take pains in treating one another fairly. Obviously, we think that this suggestion is not only valid in institutions such as jails or prisons, but that it should also apply to organizational settings, schools, politics, and so forth. Regulations or prescriptions that foster the application of fair procedures would be beneficial in obtaining and preserving harmonious relationships.

The extent to which a person is liked or is depended on by others is probably more difficult (or undesirable) to regulate than the application of fair treatment or procedures, making it more difficult to suggest practical implications derived from their relationship with the use of hard tactics. Even so, the results of the present study corroborate the more general notion that some care and courtesy in interpersonal relationships may prevent the escalation of conflict.

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