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Future Interaction Expectation and the Use of Soft and Hard Influence Tactics

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Les stratégies d'influence varient en fonction du contrôle qu'elles exercent sur la situation et la cible. Les stratégies "douces" laissent plus que les stratégies "dures" la possibilité pour la cible d'accepter ou de rejeter la tentative d'influence. La solution "dure" engendre donc généralement une plus grande tension dans la relation entre la cible et l'agent d'influence. Cette recherche est centrée sur la conséquence que la représentation de l'interaction à venir peut avoir sur le choix d'une ou l'autre stratégie. Les résultats d'une expérience indiquent que l'expectation d'une interaction diminue l'appel à l'influence en général et aux stratégies d'influence dure en particulier. On peut supposer que la perspective d'une interaction prolongée rend moins attractif le choix d'un comportement qui pourrait mettre la relation en danger. Les résultats ont aussi montré que les stratégies douces étaient plus employées que les dures et que les hommes faisaient plus appel à l'influence que les femmes.

The influence tactics that people use may vary in the extent to which they take control over the situation and the target. Soft tactics allow the target of influence more latitude in deciding whether or not to accept the employed influence than hard tactics. As a consequence hard influence tactics usually place more strain on the relationship between influencing agent and target. This study focused on the effect that the expectation of future interaction may have on the use of hard and soft influence tactics. The results of an experiment indicated that the expectation of a future interaction diminished the use of influence in general and of hard influence tactics in particular. Presumably, the expectancy of prolonged interaction made the display of behavior that might endanger the relationship less attractive. Furthermore, results showed that soft tactics were used more often than hard ones and that men employed more influence than women.

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INTRODUCTION

Everyday life is saturated with interpersonal contacts in which people try to get their way. Whether at work, at school, at home, in the pub, or in the political arena, the situation in which one person will try to influence another will eventually come up. Nowadays, a growing body of research concerns itself with the tactics people use to influence others. One of the main goals of research within this domain has been to identify the most frequently used influence tactics (e.g. Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990; Yukl & Falbe, 1990). Other research has focused more on the effects of the use of the various influence tactics (Brennan, Miller, & Seltzer, 1993; Howard, 1995; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Yukl & Tracey, 1992), and there also seems to be a growing interest in the determinants of the use of influence tactics (Farmer, Maslyn, Fedor, & Goodman, 1997; Kipnis et al., 1980; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, Blaauw, & Vermunt, 1999; Vecchio & Sussmann, 1991; Yukl & Falbe, 1990; Yukl, Guinan, & Sottolano, 1995). The vast majority of studies on influence tactics concern surveys that rely heavily on self-report measures. One of the contributions of the present study lies in fact that we investigated actual use of influence tactics in an experimentally controlled environment, which enables us to make causal inferences. Furthermore, the study contributes by focusing on the effects of future interaction expectation. Herewith we hope to unveil an important determinant of the use of influence tactics.

HARD AND SOFT INFLUENCE TACTICS

Theorising about how and why particular factors may affect the use of (some) influence tactics may be furthered by an idea about what exactly differentiates tactics from each other. It may therefore prove useful to focus on the characteristic(s) that differentiates one tactic from another rather than on the individual tactics. Hence, the formulation of hypotheses about the relative likelihood that certain tactics rather than others will be used may benefit from a focus on *dimensions* discriminating between influence tactics. Several researchers have been concerned with uncovering the underlying dimensions of influence tactics (Bruins, 1997; Falbo & Peplau, 1980). Probably the dimension of greatest importance is the *strength* of influence tactics. Tactic strength 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). According to their place on the *strength dimension*, influence tactics may be formed into groups to reflect higher-order categories of influence (e.g. Bruins, 1997; Farmer et al., 1997;

Lamude, 1994; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg et al., 1999). A group of *hard* influence tactics and a group of *soft* influence tactics may thus be formed on either side of the strength dimension. The higher-order category of hard influence tactics consists of tactics that are relatively controlling and coercive. Influence tactics that have been considered to belong to this category are, for instance, pressure and assertiveness, coalition, legitimating, and blocking. In contrast, the higher-order category of soft influence tactics entails tactics like ingratiation, inspirational appeals, and rationality (Farmer et al., 1997; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg et al., 1999; Yukl, Falbe, & Youn, 1993). Although each subcategory of soft tactics can clearly be distinguished from another and each subcategory of soft tactics is recognisable by different influencing behavior, they all share the relatively large amount of freedom that the target is allowed in choosing whether or not to comply. Ergo, the distinction between hard and soft tactics mirrors the difference in forcefulness of influence tactics.

A differential use of hard and soft influence tactics has been found for various objectives of influence attempts (Kipnis et al., 1980; Rao, Schmidt, & Murray, 1995; Yukl et al., 1995), for various hierarchical positions of the target of influence (Kipnis et al., 1980; Yukl & Falbe, 1990; Yukl & Tracey, 1992), for people having high or low self-esteem (e.g. Raven, 1992), for individuals having high or low status (Stahelski & Paynton, 1995), for high or low competent individuals (van Knippenberg, van Eijbergen, & Wilke, 1999), for people high or low on Machiavellianism (Farmer et al., 1997; Falbo, 1977; Grams & Rogers, 1990; Vecchio & Sussmann, 1991), for transactional and transformational leadership styles (Deluga & Souza, 1991), for different levels of education (Farmer et al., 1997), for people influencing a group or an individual (Guerin, 1995), and for ingroup versus outgroup targets (Bruins, 1997). Indeed, the relative frequency with which hard and soft tactics are used appears to be influenced by many determinants. However, despite this varying relative frequency of hard and soft tactic use, there seems to be a consistent general preference for soft tactics over hard tactics. This preference for soft over hard tactics may be explained by the differential burden that the use of these two categories of influence tactics may place on the relationship between agent and target, as we will clarify in the following. An influencing agent wields influence with the purpose of having some effect on the target and with the hope of altering the probable course of affairs in a more desired direction. From the perspective of the target, the use of influence will likely also be experienced as being aimed at altering his or her behavior and/or the existing situation. Consequently, the use of influence can (but does not necessarily have to) come across as unpleasant to the target. In general, the use of harder tactics is perceived as less friendly and less socially desirable than the use of the softer varieties that allow the other person

some freedom (Raven, 1992; van Knippenberg, van Eijbergen, & Wilke, 1999; Yukl & Tracey, 1992). Thus, the use of hard tactics, in particular, will be experienced as disagreeable by the target. Therefore, the use of hard tactics is more likely to place a strain on the relationship between agent and target than the use of softer tactics. So, the reason that earlier (mainly survey) studies found that influence behavior is dominated by the use of soft influence tactics may be that the use of hard tactics will more easily endanger the relationship between agent and target than the use of softer tactics. In congruence with these earlier findings, we predict that *in general* hard tactics will be deployed less often than soft tactics (Hypothesis 1). A confirmation of this hypothesis would thus not only replicate earlier findings, but would do so in an experimentally controlled environment.

FUTURE INTERACTION EXPECTATION

Influence, which is always wielded over someone else, always entails a social interaction between two or more individuals. This means that the extra strain which is placed upon the relationship between agent and target(s) by the use of harder tactics, will not only result in a general preference for soft over hard tactics, but will also render relational considerations one of the more important determinants of the use of hard and soft influence tactics (cf. van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg et al., 1999). The focus in this present study, the expectation of future interaction, is one of the more prominent relational determinants.

In a number of areas of research, the impact of the anticipation of future interaction has been demonstrated. In studies pertaining to the allocation of resources it was found that allocators who expected continued interaction distributed outcomes more according to the equality rule than allocators who did not expect continued interaction (see Mannix, 1994; McClintock, Kramer, & Keil, 1984; Shapiro, 1975). Furthermore, studies on social dilemmas showed that the time horizon of the interaction between players affected the number of cooperative choices (Axelrod, 1984; Murnighan & Roth, 1983). Players were more cooperative in conditions of continued play than in the case of a single-shot interaction. Results from negotiation studies (Arnold & Carnevale, 1997; Ben-Yoav & Pruitt, 1984a, 1984b; Dittloff & Harris, 1996; Heide & Miner, 1992; Mannix, 1994; Mannix, Tinsley, & Bazerman, 1995; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986) also indicate that the expectation of a future interaction substantially affects social interaction. Generally, negotiators who expect a future relationship are more likely to engage in problem solving behaviors and less likely to behave contentiously than negotiators who do not expect to interact with each other again.

Analysing the above, the expectation of a future interaction appears to bring about a more friendly, indulgent, and cooperative interaction pattern. This behavior is likely to be instigated by the underlying notion that a person who expects a future interaction is also likely to expect that, in the future, the other person may be needed in order to obtain desired ([im]material) outcomes. Consequently, people will be more motivated to maintain a good relationship with the other (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Situations that make the maintenance of a harmonious relationship more important are less likely to provoke the display of behavior that is likely to endanger the relationship. Earlier, we already argued that the target may not necessarily appreciate the influence attempts that are directed towards him or her. The use of hard influence tactics is especially likely to put pressure on the relationship between agent and target. When we integrate all of the above, two hypotheses regarding future interaction with the target in relation to the use of influence can be formulated. First, because the expectation of a future interaction with the target will motivate potential agents to uphold a good relationship with the target and because the use of influence does not necessarily foster harmonious relationships, a lower frequency of influence employment will be found when the agent expects a continued interaction with the target as compared to the situation in which the agent does not expect continued interaction (Hypothesis 2). Second, because the use of hard influence tactics is particularly likely to strain the relation between agent and target, the expectation of a future interaction will lead especially to a lower frequency of hard tactics as compared to a situation in which no such expectation exists (Hypothesis 3).

The hypotheses were tested in a laboratory experiment in which participants were told that they were to perform a task in collaboration with another person. In the process of performing this cooperative task, participants were given the opportunity to use influence tactics. Some participants were given the opportunity to use soft tactics, while others were given the opportunity to use hard tactics. To manipulate the expectation of future interaction, participants were either led to believe that they would perform a second task with their partner (future interaction), or without their partner (no future interaction).

METHOD

Participants and Design

Forty-eight undergraduates (17 male, 31 female) participated voluntarily in return for five Dutch guilders (about US\$2.5), and were randomly assigned to conditions of a 2 (Influence Tactic: soft/hard) \times 2 (Future Interaction Expectation: yes/no) full factorial design.

Procedure

Participants were invited in groups of up to eight persons to take part in a study on “decision making”. Upon arrival, they were placed in individual cubicles, containing a computer that was used to present all of the instructions, stimuli, and questions, and to register the dependent measures. Participants first completed a task which was said to measure “contrast-sensitivity”: an ability unrelated to intelligence or mathematical acumen, but important for professions like architect or information technology specialist. Participants had to estimate, as accurately as possible, the number of black squares in a checker board grid containing a total of 180 black and white squares arranged in a random pattern. Because earlier research using the same paradigm (van Knippenberg, van Eijbergen, & Wilke, 1999) revealed that generally people use hard influence tactics sparingly, upon completion of the task all participants were led to believe that they had superior task competence compared to the competence of the person that would be their partner in the following task. This has been shown to lower the risk of obtaining a bottom-effect in the use of influence tactics. Instructions for the dyadic task were given subsequently. To emphasise the cooperative character of this dyadic task participants were told that the better the estimations of both themselves and their partner, the more additional money they could earn (up to about US\$2.5). The participant and his or her alleged coworker (the coworker was in reality simulated by a computer program) were required to perform the same estimation task as before. Participants were informed that in this task, one person per dyad would not only have the opportunity to affect task performance by giving estimates, but would also be given the opportunity to influence the coworker. Participants were led to believe that this person would be selected randomly by computer, but in reality this role was always assigned to the participants. Participants in the *hard influence tactic* condition were told that following each trial they had the opportunity to coerce an estimation on the other. This means that a definite answer would be forced on the other person, and that the other’s initial own answer would be replaced by the answer forced upon him or her. Thus, if participants made the decision to use influence in this condition, the other person would be forced to comply. Participants in the *soft influence tactic* condition were told that following each trial they had the opportunity to give advice to the other person about the estimate, but that the other person was free to decide if and to what extent the recommendation was to be followed.

Before participants started on this dyadic task, they were informed about the task that was to follow afterwards. This task would be a different kind of task than the task they were working on at that moment but would also entail the possibility of earning extra money. In the condition in which participants

expected *no future interaction* they were told that the next task would again be an individual task. This meant, as was explained, that in the following task the participant would no longer have anything to do with the other person. In contrast, participants who did expect a *future interaction* were informed that the next task would have to be performed together with the same partner again.

After this information was supplied, the dyadic task began. A total of 12 grids were presented. Following the presentation of each grid, participants gave a personal estimate, and were under the impression that their partner did the same (although this estimate was not revealed to them). Thereafter they were given the opportunity to either force an answer on the other person or to give advice about the estimate to the other person, depending on which condition they were assigned to. The main dependent variable, "frequency of influence employment", was defined as the number of times the participant used the opportunity to employ influence (minimum of 0 times, maximum of 12 times).

After completing the dyadic task, the participants were told that before proceeding to the next task, a few questions would be asked. Participants then filled out a questionnaire containing manipulation checks and additional measures. To assess if participants understood which type of influence tactic was available to them, they were asked to choose the statement that applied to their situation: "I could answer on behalf of the other person; hence I could force an answer on the other" or "I could give advice to the other person; hence, the other could choose to follow or to neglect the advice". To assess if participants knew whether or not they could expect future interaction with their partner they were asked to pick the statement that applied to their situation: "I will perform the next task together with the same partner I had in the first task; it is a collaborative task" or "I will perform the next task alone; it is an individual task". To check whether participants were aware of their higher task competence, they were asked how well they performed relative to the other on the contrast-sensitivity task (1 = *I did much worse*; 7 = *I did much better*). To assess whether or not participants had cooperative intentions, they were asked how important a good joint task result was to them (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*). Participants were also asked to indicate how much control they had exerted over the joint result of the first task (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*). At the end of the experiment, all participants were paid and debriefed.

RESULTS

In all ANOVAs Influence Tactic (hard/soft) and Future Interaction Expectation (yes/no) were factors in the design. All analyses also checked for possible effects of gender on the use of influence tactics, since these are sometimes reported in studies on influence.

Manipulation Checks

Testifying to the success of our manipulations, all participants picked the statements that corresponded with the conditions (hard vs. soft influence tactic; future interaction vs. no future interaction, respectively) to which they were assigned.

Frequency of Influence Employment

Congruent with the hypothesis that hard tactics would be used less often than soft tactics, hard tactics were employed 4.26 times on average and soft tactics 6.80 times ($F(1, 40) = 7.81, P < 0.01, \eta^2 = 0.14$). Furthermore (and conforming to hypothesis 2), participants who expected future interaction with their partner wielded less influence ($M = 4.84$) than participants who did not expect to deal with their partner again in the future ($M = 6.39; F(1, 40) = 4.20, P < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.08$). As mentioned before, it was also expected that the lower frequency of influence exertion in the case of a future interaction expectation would mainly be due to the relatively infrequent employment of the hard influence tactics (as compared to the soft influence tactics). Although no interaction between Future Interaction Expectation and Influence Tactic ($F(1, 40) = 1.79, ns, \eta^2 = 0.04$) appeared, planned comparisons (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1985) showed that, in the future interaction expectation condition, participants wielded significantly less influence when they had hard tactics available than when they had soft tactics available ($M_{\text{hard}} = 3.33$ vs. $M_{\text{soft}} = 6.23; F(1, 40) = 4.42, P < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.08$), while no such difference was found for participants in the no future interaction expectation condition ($M_{\text{hard}} = 5.27$ vs. $M_{\text{soft}} = 7.42; F(1, 40) = 2.47, ns, \eta^2 = 0.05$). Finally, male participants wielded influence more often ($M = 6.94$) than female participants ($M = 4.84; F(1, 40) = 6.82, P < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.12$).

Additional Measures

As intended, participants believed that they performed better on the contrast-sensitivity task than their partner ($M = 4.77$). ANOVA yielded no main or interaction effects. Furthermore, participants had cooperative intentions: they indicated that a good joint task result was important to them ($M = 4.98$). Again, no main or interaction effects were found.

Participants' reported amount of control over the joint outcome did not differ depending on the available influence tactic when a future interaction was anticipated ($M_{\text{hard}} = 4.42$ vs. $M_{\text{soft}} = 4.46; F(1, 40) < 1; ns, \eta^2 < 0.01$). When no future interaction was anticipated, participants who had hard tactics available reported having exerted more control over the joint outcome ($M = 5.09$) than participants who had soft tactics available ($M = 3.09; F(1, 40) = 8.40, P < 0.01, \eta^2 = 0.15$). Hence, the pattern of this interaction

($F(1, 40) = 7.78, P < 0.01, \eta^2 = 0.14$) is congruent with the pattern of results with regard to the use of influence.

DISCUSSION

The present study adds to the growing understanding of the factors governing the use of influence tactics, and in particular of the role of relational considerations. First, the study supports the findings from earlier correlational studies on influence in showing experimentally that individuals use hard tactics less often than soft ones. Apparently, tactics that may be assumed to place a strain on the relationship between agent and target are less frequently employed. Furthermore, this study identified future interaction expectation as a determinant of the use of hard and soft influence tactics. When future interaction was expected less influence was employed and especially less hard influence tactics were used. Presumably, employing coercive and controlling influence tactics is more attractive in a single interaction situation than in a multiple interaction situation. In congruence with this, individuals who expected no future interaction indicated that they exerted more control over the task performance when they had the availability of hard tactics than when they had the availability of soft tactics, whereas this effect did not appear when individuals expected to be confronted with the target again. Thus, these results suggest that the mere availability of influence tactics that are usually considered to be rather coercive does not necessarily lead to a higher (perceived) exercise of control. Influencing agents who expected a future interaction and who had hard influence tactics available, did not report having exerted more control (and their actual influence behavior is quite in line herewith) than agents who had tactics available that leave the target some leeway, while this effect was existent when agents did not expect a future interaction.

The decision to make participants believe that they had higher task competence had, apart from diminishing the chance of obtaining a bottom-effect, another advantage. Because we made participants believe that they were more competent than their partner, the results suggest that relational considerations can prevail above direct task considerations. After all, individuals with relatively high task competence may be inclined to consider the employment of influence useful because they expect that their potential task contributions will have higher utility than will those of others. Their presumed ability to make useful contributions is not likely to be dependent on whether or not they expect to interact with the same partner again in the future. Consequently, if people were only interested in obtaining positive task results, the frequency with which they would use hard and soft influence tactics would not be affected by future interaction expectation. However, the results of this study showed that less (hard) tactics are used in case of a future interaction expectation. Apparently, the desire to maintain

a positive relationship with the target makes people less willing to employ influence, even though this could have been beneficial for the task performance. Of course, this reduced willingness to employ influence may be caused by an intrinsic motivation to maintain positive relations (i.e. people value harmonious relationships) or it may also be instigated by more strategic considerations (i.e. future outcomes may be contingent on the quality of the relationship). Whatever the underlying motive, the above gives strength to the conclusion that relational considerations play a central role in the decision to use hard and soft tactics.

This study furthermore showed that men wielded more influence than women did. Several explanations pertaining to the differential use of influence by men and women can be found in the literature. According to the structural model it is a person's power and prestige position, rather than gender-role expectations, that affect the choice of influence behaviors as well as the perceptions of their appropriateness (see Aguinis & Adams, 1998, for an overview). Some researchers thus claim that a differential use of influence between men and women is due to the fact that, in general, women hold positions with less power than men (Molm, 1985). Yet, in the present study the power positions of the participants were fixed and made explicit: all participants had the opportunity to use influence tactics and all had higher task competence than their alleged partners. Indeed, the data revealed no sex effect on perceived relative competence. Even so, the results did show that women were less likely than men to use hard and soft influence tactics. Hence, the present study does not seem to support the structural model. Another commonly used model of gender and influence is the social-role model (Eagly, 1987; cf. Aguinis & Adams, 1998; Tepper et al., 1993; cf. Expectation States Theory: Berger, Wagner, & Zelditch, 1985). This model asserts that since men and women are expected and "supposed" to behave according to the stereotypes associated with their gender, women will eventually use less influence than men (or will, for instance, be less aggressive than men; see Bettencourt & Miller, 1996, for a meta-analysis on this subject). Although the results of the present study are more in line with this reasoning, definite conclusions should await additional research.

Apart from the theoretical value that the present study may have, the results also have some tentative implications for organisational practice. To date, a growing number of people are "flex-workers" (Barry & Crant, 1994; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993). This flexible workforce includes employees with a short-term contract, temporary employees, interim managers, etc. The relatively short stay with an organisation is characteristic of this type of employee. While in general personnel with a permanent appointment are expected to (or expect themselves to) remain within the organisation for an indefinite period of time, externalised workers are expected (or expect) to leave the organisation in the near future. In other words, there is an expectation

of more prolonged interaction with tenured personnel compared to flexible workers. This tendency to make more use of various types of temporary personnel may well have consequences for the way that members of an organisation interact with each other. More specifically, it may be that hard tactics will be used more often when the target stays only temporarily with the organisation than when the target is a tenured member of staff. It may be argued that supervisors, colleagues, or subordinates will feel less restrained in using harder tactics when they expect that the target will leave the organisation in the not-too-distant future. Since the target is not likely to be needed in the future in order to obtain desired outcomes, the maintenance of a harmonious relationship becomes less important and behavior that could endanger the relationship will be more readily displayed. Consequently, the tendency to make more use of personnel with temporary appointments may foster the development of an unfriendly, more coercive interaction pattern. Of course, future research should investigate the effects of recruitment policy on the use of influence tactics before more definite conclusions in this respect can be reached.

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