How do I get my way? A meta-analytic review of research on influence tactics

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ABSTRACT

Despite considerable research investigating the role of influence tactics on work-related outcomes in organizations, consensus on the effectiveness of influence tactics has been elusive. Specifically, there is a lack of integration concerning the relationships between proactive influence tactics and their outcomes. We investigate the effectiveness of 11 influence tactics from a comprehensive perspective using meta-analytic techniques. In particular, the current study focuses on relationships between each of the 11 influence tactics (i.e., rational persuasion, exchange, inspirational appeal, legitimating, apprising, pressure, collaboration, ingratiation, consultation, personal appeals, and coalition) and task- and relations-oriented outcomes. In addition, we investigate the moderating effects of the direction of influence tactics, measurement of influence tactics, singular influence tactic (versus use of a combination of influence tactics), independence of data sources, and study setting involved in the study. Regardless of task- and relations-oriented outcomes, based on 49 independent samples ($N = 8987$), our results show positive relationships between outcomes and rational persuasion, inspirational appeal, apprising, collaboration, ingratiation, consultation, and a negative relationship between pressure and outcomes. Rational persuasion is the only tactic which held stable positive relationships with both categories of outcomes regardless of moderating factors. Implications and directions for future research in the area of influence tactics are discussed.

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Introduction

Influence is essential to get one's way (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980). The success of an attempt to influence the attitudes and behaviors of others depends to a great extent on specific type(s) of behavior used to exert influence, which is called *influence tactic*(s) (Kipnis et al., 1980; Yukl, 2006; Yukl & Falbe, 1990; Yukl & Seifert, 2002). For the past three decades, a number of organizational researchers have linked influence tactics to broader range of work-related outcomes, such as performance appraisal, helping behavior, resistance, leader–member exchange (LMX), and commitment (Kolodinsky, Treadway, & Ferris, 2007; Sparrowe, Soetjipto, & Kraimer, 2006; Tepper, Eisenbach, Kirby, & Potter, 1998). Despite this research, inconsistent findings regarding the effectiveness of influence tactics persist. For example, whereas Rao, Schmidt, and Murray (1995) suggested a positive

effect of *ingratiation* on favorable performance appraisal, Thacker and Wayne (1995) suggested *ingratiation* has a negative effect on supervisors' assessments of focal employee's promotion. Similarly, Su (2010) found a negative relationship between *coalition* and performance appraisal, while Rao et al. (1995) found the opposite result regarding the same phenomenon.

These inconsistent findings have limited the extent to which the literature of influence tactics can be meaningfully integrated with management practices. Therefore, the present study seeks to shed light on confusion surrounding influence tactics by utilizing meta-analysis to estimate true effects of various influence tactics on outcomes in the workplace. The prior literature on influence tactics has identified many different influence behaviors such as blocking and sanction (Schermerhorn & Bond, 1991; Vecchio & Sussmann, 1991), manipulating, socializing, negotiating, and politicking (Steensma & van Milligen, 2003). However, in terms of getting systematic state of the field, it is meaningful to investigate the effectiveness of most frequently used influence tactics in a work setting that are generally examined by many researchers in this field. Thus, this study focused 11 proactive influence tactics identified by subsequent research of Yukl, Seifert, and Chavez (2008) (i.e., rational persuasion, exchange, inspirational appeal, legitimating, apprising, pressure, collaboration, ingratiation, consultation, personal appeals, and coalition). Because each individual may use different influence tactics in various situations, examining these 11 proactive tactics may contribute to our comprehensive understanding of interpersonal influence behaviors in organizations.

In addition, the effectiveness of specific influence tactics used by a particular agent can be examined from many different perspectives. In a work setting, individuals choose to use proactive influence behaviors to obtain a desired outcome. For example, they may use *rational persuasion* to attain their task-oriented outcomes, such as receiving a favorable performance appraisal, while they may apply an *ingratiation* tactic to enhance their relations-oriented outcomes such as creating a favorable impression with their managers. The early examination of leadership and organizational literature has focused on the use of task-oriented and relations-oriented behaviors as measures of individual and organizational effectiveness (Bass, 2008; Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954). Specifically, task-oriented behaviors focus on the task to be accomplished by others, whereas relations-oriented behaviors pay more attention to the quality of the relationship with others (Bass, 2008). Although prior research has examined distinct antecedents of task-oriented or relations-oriented outcomes and linked outcomes to individual and organizational effectiveness (Bass, 2008; Sherwood & DePaolo, 2005), little effort has been directed toward how each influence tactic may influence task-oriented and relations-oriented outcomes. Given the extensive use of various influence tactics in a workplace (Epitropaki & Martin, 2013; Lam, O'Donnell, & Robertson, 2015), the impacts of each influence tactic on outcomes may vary between task-oriented and relations-oriented outcomes. As such, understanding the effectiveness of each influence tactic under a parsimonious yet thorough framework of task-oriented and relations-oriented outcomes is a critical component involved in effective leadership.

Further, because of the complicated nature of interpersonal influence processes at the workplace (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003), scholars have highlighted the importance of understanding boundary conditions that affect the magnitude of relationships between each influence tactic and task-oriented and relations-oriented outcomes (e.g., Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Higgins et al., 2003; Yukl & Tracey, 1992). In particular, in their meta-analytic review on influence tactics, Higgins et al. (2003) provide potential moderators that remain to be clarified and urge scholars to examine the moderating effects further. Specifically, the authors suggest the direction of the influence tactic (i.e., downward, lateral, and upward) is likely to affect its effectiveness since supervisors and subordinates are in a different position to recognize and understand original intention of specific influence tactic use. Also, Higgins and colleagues note that although there are some representative instruments used to measure influence tactics (i.e., POIS and IBQ), little is known about whether the magnitude of effectiveness varies depending on instruments employed. Lastly, Higgins and colleagues argue that prior studies showing certain combinations of tactics are useful to obtaining desirable outcomes (Falbe & Yukl, 1992), indicating future research in this field needs further examination on the effectiveness of use of combined influence tactics over a singular influence tactic.

Therefore, the present study investigates above three suggestions as moderators to answer the call from Higgins et al. (2003). In addition, going beyond Higgins et al.' (2003) recommendations, we further consider two additional moderators. First, we investigate the moderating effect of data sources (i.e., same source vs. different sources), as single-source bias may inflate the true correlations between influence tactics and task- and relations-oriented outcomes (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Second, the effectiveness of particular forms of influence could vary across different contexts (Ferris & Judge, 1991). As such, we examine the moderating effect of the study setting of the prior research (i.e., public and private organization) as well.

In sum, the purpose of this study is to summarize quantitatively and evaluate the relationships between each of the 11 proactive influence tactics and its effectiveness with task- and relations-oriented outcomes, using meta-analytic techniques. Notably, our study contributes to the area of influence tactics in three ways. First, our study updates a prior meta-analysis of the influence tactics by including studies conducted from the year of 2001 to 2015, as the year of 2000 was the cutoff year for including the articles in meta-analysis of Higgins et al. (2003). By doing so, the results of our meta-analysis could expand the literature of influence tactics and accumulate the effectiveness of influence tactics on their outcomes over the prior work. Moreover, in the current study, we also include and provide the results of meta-analysis of the effects of a wider range of influence tactics (i.e., inspirational appeal, apprising, collaboration, apprising, personal appeals, legitimating, pressure, and coalition tactics) on their outcomes which were not considered in the work of Higgins et al. (2003).

Second, we classify the outcomes of influence tactics into task- and relations-oriented categories and examine their relationships, providing a more general, yet novel, comparison of the effects of influence tactics on targeted outcomes. Examination of the effectiveness of each influence tactic under this parsimonious outcome category is meaningful given the importance of the categories of task- and relations-oriented behaviors/outcomes in both the literature on leadership and organizational behavior as well as real work setting.

Third, we expand on prior meta-analysis of influence tactics by examining various moderators (i.e., the direction of influence tactics, measurement of influence tactics, singular influence tactic use, independence of data sources, and study setting involved in the