



Understanding employees' reactions to supervisors' influence behaviors

A community sample predicting employee commitment, turnover, and stress

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Abstract

Purpose – This study seeks to demonstrate that employees' reactions to their supervisors' influence behaviors are governed by meanings inferred from the behaviors. Another aim is to develop a method in which "weights" for predicting employees' reactions are assigned using mean ratings of perceptions of the features and social/organizational implications of the influence behaviors.

Design/methodology/approach – Employees of an energy utility completed survey questionnaires concerning the extent of their supervisors' use of specified influence tactics. Employees' organizational commitment, supervisor commitment, turnover intention, and stress also were surveyed. A separate, community sample rated the influence tactics for dimensions of meaning or implications of the tactics. Data from the two samples were combined in a novel arithmetic scoring procedure as one of several analyses looking for evidence of the specified dimensions' effects.

Findings – The study finds that employees' work attitudes and other outcomes were predicted to a statistically significant degree by dimensional, perceptual characterizations of the influence tactics used by their supervisors. In culminating multiple regression analyses, respectfulness was associated with supervisor commitment, turnover intention, and emotional distress; directness was associated with organizational commitment. Additional analyses indicated that other dimensions of meaning also were associated with outcomes.

Research limitations/implications – The meanings of supervisors' influence behaviors are somewhat culture-specific, so the generalizability of findings to other cultures is uncertain. However, the central role of social inferences in reactions to supervisors' influence behaviors may be replicable to other cultures if culture-specific content or ratings are substituted there. This research also has the usual limitations of cross-sectional, correlational research.

Practical implications – In their interactions with employees, managers and supervisors should be aware that their influence behaviors, collectively, generate reactions that are significant for employees' motivation and well-being. Supervisory behaviors and work contexts should be managed so that employees will infer that their supervisors are showing respect and are being honest and direct.

Originality/value – Processes previously assumed to intervene between supervisory influence behavior and employee reactions were operationalized and demonstrated. Novel methods were developed for this research, and these methods may also be applicable to other research domains that involve sets of behaviors that parallel existing schemes for influence behavior.

Keywords Employee attitudes, Influence, Supervisors, Line managers, Job satisfaction, Employee turnover

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

When a supervisor wants an employee to do something, the supervisor might provide a rationale along with a request, or offer a favor in exchange for compliance, or simply ask the employee to do the task. This article's first aim is to shed light on the processes that intervene between managers' or supervisors' influence behaviors and their employees' reactions. Employees' reactions to supervisors' influence behaviors have been suggested to depend on interpretations that employees make about the nature of their relationship with the supervisor, and upon the implications of these interpretations for perceived social standing and for the prospects for need satisfaction in the workplace (Michela and Greenstein, in press). The present study seeks evidence for this theoretical account through analysis of data from employees who rated the extent of various influence behaviors by their supervisors and who also rated their personal states of affect, attitude (commitment), and behavioral intention.

The second aim is to illustrate a novel approach to testing theoretical accounts of this kind. Given a theory that explains employees' reactions to influence behavior in terms of interpretations of it, information specifically about these interpretations obviously is pertinent to examining the theory. However, in this research the source of this information was distinct, by design, from the source of the data on the occurrence of influence behaviors and reactions. That is, a separate sample of survey respondents provided information about their interpretations of the same influence behaviors as had been rated by the employee sample. Subsequently, the data from the two samples were combined or compared in various ways. Pros and cons of this approach will be considered in this article.

Addressing these aims, the article will begin with a focused review and analysis of past research on distinctions among supervisors' influence behaviors and the role of subordinates' perceptions of these behaviors in determining their consequences. Then the methodology will be described, with details of sampling and measures for both an employee sample and a community sample. In the Results section, connections between perceptions of influence behaviors and their consequences will be examined using a number of perspectives or approaches. The Discussion section will assess accomplishment of the article's aims and offer suggestions for future research and present practice.

Categorizing influence behaviors

By definition, *leadership* implies influence of the leader over the follower. In interactions when a manager or supervisor wants a subordinate to act in particular way, there is either an implicit or explicit appeal by the supervisor for compliance. A widely-known scheme for categorizing some of these appeals in various leader-follower dyads was developed by Yukl and his colleagues (e.g. Yukl and Tracey, 1992).

The categories in this and related schemes (e.g. Kipnis *et al.*, 1980) are often termed "tactics" for influence. The conception is that the supervisor or other "agent" of influence is aware that the subordinate (or other "target") might not be inclined to comply unless the appeal provides a basis for compliance (Raven, 1993). For example, the appeal might cite the agent's legitimate authority to make the request, or offer some reward in return for compliance.

Past research in this area (e.g. Erez *et al.*, 1986; Kipnis *et al.*, 1980; Yukl and Falbe, 1990; Falbe and Yukl, 1992) has given rise to specific categorizations of influence

tactics and evidence of the consequences of the particular tactics used with employees. Results of these studies consistently show that some tactics, including consultation (e.g. involving an employee in a decision) and inspirational appeal (e.g. a supervisor arouses enthusiasm by appealing to values), are relatively effective for eliciting commitment (Yukl and Tracey, 1992; Yukl and Falbe, 1990). These tactics are thought to be even more effective when used in combination with rational persuasion (a supervisor uses logic and facts to persuade employees to undertake a task) (Yukl and Tracey, 1992). Tactics such as pressure (persistent reminders), coalition (recruiting others to help a supervisor to convince an employee to do something) and legitimating (expressing the authority to tell an employee to do something) are not very effective for eliciting commitment, although they may result in compliance (Yukl and Tracey, 1992).

Meanings of tactics in generating consequences

How may these differential consequences be explained? A close look at past research suggests that underlying meanings of supervisor influence tactics lead to the various employee outcomes such as affective commitment and satisfaction. For example, Sparrowe *et al.* (2006, p. 1196), distinguishing between “soft” and “hard” tactics, make predictions about their effects based on employees’ likely interpretations:

Soft tactics, such as consultation, might be interpreted as cues of high standing and respect because they communicate to members that the leader respects and recognizes the member’s potential contributions to decisions that affect the work group. Hard tactics, such as pressure, implicitly question the member’s motivation, and thus carry cues of low standing and a lack of respect.

Theorizing in the field of leadership can be seen, more generally, to have shifted over time from a focus “on the internal dispositions associated with effective leaders to broader inquiries that include emphases on the cognitions, attributes, behaviors, and contexts in which leaders and followers are dynamically embedded and interact over time” (Avolio, 2007, p. 25). For example, a key theoretical construct in Lord and Brown’s (2004) analysis of leadership processes is that of cognitive schemas, which provide a basis for inferring meaning from events in interpersonal interactions.

Research on “social power” provides further reason to believe that employees’ perceptions of properties, or meanings of tactics, are fundamental to tactics’ effects on employees. The power interaction model (Raven, 1993) explains the influence process from the perspective of the supervisor. In this account, when a supervisor wishes to influence an employee, he or she undertakes an assessment of available power bases. Previous studies of bases of power have identified six bases of social power (Raven, 1993). These are coercive power, reward power, legitimate power, expert power, referent power, and informational power.

Depending on the existing relationship between the supervisor and employee, the supervisor assesses what are his/her available bases of power and what is his/her preferred power basis. Once a power basis has been chosen, a supervisor prepares for the influence attempt (e.g. setting the scene) and finally the attempt to influence is carried out. The effects of the influence attempt, whether positive or negative, are assessed, which could lead to the use of this particular power base again or to a change in tactics.

This analysis implies a belief by agents (supervisors) that targets (subordinates) categorize, infer, and react in ways predictable within cultures or societies. That is, it

implies presumed social consensus about the effects and meaning of particular ways of influencing.

In sum, this analysis suggests that the particular influence tactic is not necessarily the fundamental source or mediator of employees' reactions that serves to influence behaviors by supervisors. Instead, employees' interpretations of the meanings of the influence tactics are critical.

Potential consequences of employees' responses to influence attempts

What meanings matter and why do they matter? The answer most likely depends on the consequences or outcomes that are of concern. For example, in the determination of work stress, personal control has been found to be a key factor (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Thus, employees may be buffered from symptoms of stress, such as emotional distress, when their supervisors give up control, such as through employee involvement as a means of inducing employee compliance with requests. Stress and burnout have been found to relate more generally to the employee's perception of supervisor consideration (Seltzer and Numeroff, 1988), so inconsiderate means of influence (such as deceptive or manipulative ones) may be expected to predict greater symptoms of stress, with considerate and respectful ones predicting lesser symptoms.

The employee's wish to maintain membership in the organization, as indicated by turnover intention, is another key outcome that can be affected by employees' perceptions of their supervisors' influence behaviors. Extensive research on employee turnover (e.g. Mobley, 1982) points to the likely impact of employees' inferences concerning whether or not they are treated respectfully or with due consideration.

The employee's basic attitudes toward the supervisor and his or her employing organization also may be expected to be affected by perceptions of the supervisor's influence behaviors. These basic attitudes have been conceptualized and operationalized as affective commitment to the supervisor and affective commitment to the organization, and have been found to be influenced by aspects of interactions with supervisors (Hellriegel *et al.*, 1992). These commitments are believed to be important to other outcomes involving motivation and performance (Mowday *et al.*, 1979).

Assessing meanings of influence behaviors

How should the perceptions or meanings of supervisors' influence behaviors be assessed for the purposes of testing the model? One straightforward design would require employees to rate not only the extent of occurrence of various behaviors and various theorized consequences (organizational commitment, turnover intention, etc.), but also various interpretations (respectfulness, directness vs indirectness, etc.).

A practical problem with this approach is that employees or their employers may not be willing to spend the time required to report a wide range of perceptions about influence tactics' meanings along with the sets of ratings of tactics' occurrences and employees' states (presumed consequences such as commitment) that only the employees can provide. Thus, in many instances it may only be possible to examine the roles of tactics' meanings if some source other than the employees themselves can supply information about those meanings.

Furthermore, many researchers believe that when ratings of theoretically inter-related states are obtained from the same source (employees themselves, in this instance) various forms of contamination or "rater bias" may occur. For example, a

meta-analysis by Ilies *et al.* (2007) indicated that the correlation of rated quality of leader-member exchange with organizational citizenship behavior is higher when the same source provides data for both variables.

For the present study it was expected that the contribution of rater bias or related distortions to predictor-outcome associations could be reduced by obtaining information about tactics' meanings from informants other than the employees surveyed about occurrence of tactics and about states of affective commitment as well as other theorized outcomes. The tactics' meanings were assessed in a normative or nomothetic way by asking a separate community sample to rate each tactic in terms of various characteristics (e.g. directness, respectfulness). These ratings were then averaged and these average meanings were, in effect, attributed to members of the employee sample in the manner detailed next. This application of a consensual meaning is consistent with social power and influence theory as it has been sketched here. The common, cultural frame of meanings shared by agents and targets is part of what enables agents to anticipate (albeit imperfectly) the likely extent of target compliance or other reactions, and to adjust tactic enactment accordingly.

Methods

Overview of design

Two samples of subjects participated in this study, with each sample providing different kinds of information needed to test the theoretical framework. The first sample consisted of 180 employees of one public sector organization (an energy utility). Participants in this employee sample provided us with ratings of their supervisors' frequency of use of nine influence tactics and of states of satisfaction and other variables considered to be outcomes in our framework. The second sample consisted of 316 individuals residing in the catchment area for a sample survey. They provided data concerning dimensions of perception and meaning underlying the nine supervisor influence tactics. The first group of participants is referred to as the employee sample, and the second, the community sample. Data from the community sample were used in computations to assign scores in the employee sample for variables identified in the theoretical analysis, and for other purposes of interpretation.

Employee sample

Usable questionnaires were completed and returned by 180 of 220 employees asked to complete questionnaires, yielding an 82 percent response rate. In this sample with 64 percent male members, approximately 20 percent held secretarial or clerical jobs, 30 percent technical jobs, and 50 percent held managerial or professional jobs (e.g. industrial hygiene practitioners). This questionnaire had originally been designed to aid organizational diagnosis in preparation for an empowerment initiative in the organization.

Measures of influence tactics. The instructions and survey questions used to measure influence tactics for this study filled page 7 of an eight-page questionnaire. Instructions were to "rate (by circling the number on the scale) how often your immediate supervisor uses the following methods to try to get you to do something or to give you directions for your work." Below the instructions, the nine influence tactics

shown in Table I appeared. Each influence tactic was rated on a nine-point scale ranging from “never” to “always.” These tactics were taken directly from Yukl and Tracey’s (1992) study. The tactics had been derived over the course of several past studies (e.g. Kipnis *et al.*, 1980; Schriesheim and Hinkin, 1990) involving factor analysis, Q-sorts by subject-matter experts, inter-rater agreement in the coding of critical incidents, analysis of content validity, and analysis of discriminant validity.

Measures of outcome variables. On various pages before page 7 of the questionnaire, employees rated their agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) with 37 statements pertaining to four outcome variables: affective commitment toward the organization (ACO), affective commitment toward the supervisor (ACS), emotional distress (ED), and turnover intention (TOI). Responses were factor analyzed (principal axis extraction with varimax rotation) to identify an internally consistent subset of items to use to measure each of these four variables. The items that loaded highly (above 0.40) on a single one of the four corresponding rotated factors in this analysis were grouped together as shown in Table II, which also reports consequent scale reliabilities (Cronbach’s alphas) when items were summed within sets.

Affective commitment (ACO and ACS). Affective commitment is formally defined by Porter *et al.* (1974, p. 604) in terms of “the strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization.” The questions used in this study to measure affective commitment were based on the Mowday *et al.* (1979) *Organizational Commitment Questionnaire*. We sought to measure both affective commitment toward one’s organization and toward one’s supervisor. We therefore expanded the original measure, worded for assessment of the organization, by adding parallel questions about the supervisor. For example, following the original item worded, “I really care

Rational persuasion	Your supervisor uses logic and facts to persuade you that his/her request will result in the accomplishment of the task
Inspirational appeal	Your supervisor arouses your enthusiasm by appealing to your values and aspirations, or by increasing your confidence that you can do it
Consultation	Your supervisor seeks your participation in planning an activity or change
Ingratiation	Your supervisor seeks to get you in a good mood or to think favorably of him/her before asking you to do something
Exchange	Your supervisor offers you an exchange of favors, indicates a willingness to reciprocate at a later time, or promises you a share of the benefits if you help to complete the task
Personal appeal	Your supervisor appeals to your feelings of loyalty and friendship toward him/her before asking you to do something
Coalition	Your supervisor seeks the aid of others to persuade you to do something, or uses the support of others as a reason for you to agree also
Legitimizing	Your supervisor claims that he/she has the authority to make the request, or verifies that the request is consistent with organizational policies and practices
Pressure	Your supervisor uses demands, threats, or persistent reminders to influence you to do what he/she wants

Table I.
Definitions and
descriptions of the nine
influence tactics

Table II.
Questionnaire items and
Cronbach's alpha for
outcome variables

Questionnaire items	Alpha reliability
<i>Affective commitment toward supervisor (ACS)</i>	0.95
I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for my supervisor	
I find that my values and my supervisor's values are very similar	
I am proud to tell others about my supervisor	
My supervisor really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance	
I really care about what happens to my supervisor	
<i>Affective commitment toward organization (ACO)</i>	0.80
I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization	
I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar	
I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization	
This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance	
I really care about the fate of this organization	
For me, this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work	
<i>Turnover intention (TOI)</i>	0.80
I will probably look for a new job in the next year	
How likely is it that you will look for a new job in the next 12 months?	
<i>Emotional distress (ED)</i>	0.71
I have feelings of being depressed or sad	
I feel nervous, fidgety, or tense	

about the fate of this organization," we constructed the parallel item, "I really care about what happens to my supervisor."

Turnover intention (TO). Turnover intention was measured by a two-item index taken from the *Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire* (Cammann *et al.*, 1979). An illustrative item is, "I will probably look for a new job in the next year."

Emotional distress (ED). Emotional distress is often measured by researchers to detect individuals' detrimental reactions ("strain") to stressful life events. The items selected to measure emotional distress were typical of items used for this purpose in research on stress and coping (e.g. Caplan *et al.*, 1980). An example of one of these items is, "I feel nervous, fidgety or tense."

Community sample

As noted in the overview, the community sample was drawn in order to obtain ratings of the tactics' meanings, so that these data could be applied to employee sample data in tests of the theory.

Participants rated, on a nine-point scale, each of the influence tactics on a single one of the underlying dimensions shown in Table III. These dimensions were derived from the theoretical analysis presented in the Introduction and other prior research. For example, the dimension of "directness of influence" tactic was identified explicitly in Falbo (1977) and Falbo and Peplau (1980).

Each questionnaire began with the following instructions:

Please complete this question if you are presently or were ever employed outside the home (*full time or part time*).

Common stem	Specifically tell us ...
Rationality	... whether a supervisor or boss would be offering sensible or understandable reasons why someone should do something if he or she behaved this way toward you
Involvement	... how much you would feel involved in decision making if a supervisor or boss behaved this way toward you
Respect	... how much you would feel respected as a person if a supervisor or boss behaved this way toward you
Directness	... whether you think the supervisor's or boss's approach to influencing you would be relatively direct or indirect if he or she behaved this way toward you
Deception	... how much you would feel deceived or tricked by your supervisor or boss into doing a task if he or she behaved this way toward you

Table III.
Dimensions for ratings of
influence tactics by
community sample

Note: Each dimension was rated on a nine-point scale with appropriate anchor phrases above 1, 5 and 9

After a blank line, it continued:

This section lists nine ways a boss or supervisor might try to influence an employee to do a task. For every one of these ways, please circle a number between 1 and 9 (*along the right hand margin*) to give your feelings about it.

Then this paragraph ended with a sentence that was specific to the dimension of meaning that was being rated by the respondent. These sentences appear in Table III.

On the single questionnaire page for each respondent there next appeared anchoring terms, spanning left to right across the page, corresponding to the questions in Table III. For example, for the question on employee involvement, at the far left and above the number "1" were the words "I would experience *no* sense of employee involvement." In the middle along the same lines there appeared "I would experience *some* sense of employee involvement," and along the far right (above "9"), "I would experience a *major* sense of employee involvement."

Then, in each of nine rows, there appeared the same descriptions of the nine influence tactics as given to the employee sample (as in Table I). Beside each definition, there was a nine-point scale (i.e. the numbers 1 through 9 arrayed left to right).

This community sample consisted of 316 participants of whom 53.9 percent were women. Of these 316, approximately 62 percent worked full-time, 14 percent worked part time, and 23 percent indicated they did not work outside the home at the time of this study. Given that the instructions had said respondents should answer this study's questions only if they were presently or *ever* employed outside the home, and considering that 59 people who returned questionnaires to the survey administrators did not answer these questions, it seemed likely that most of these 59 non-respondents were the people who had not ever worked outside the home. The 23 percent of respondents who did not work outside the home at the time of the study were most likely retired or temporarily out of the workforce. Moreover, with at least 32 respondents per rating scale, the exclusion of the non-employed participants had no discernable effect on the data. Thus, we used all 316 participants' data to form the means used in analyses.

Survey administration was accomplished by the Survey Research Centre (SRC) of the author's university. Households in the university's metropolitan region were sampled randomly from public records (city tax assessments) for inclusion. Each potential participant received a pre-contact informational letter; a main mailing; and several follow-ups. The response rate was 50 percent (375 of 750 mailed), without taking non-delivery of surveys into account (e.g. because people moved), or 63 percent of delivered surveys. Case weighting for proportional representation of population groups was applied as recommended by the SRC (Goyder *et al.*, 2002).

Results

Conventional analysis of tactics' consequences

In this first approach to data analysis, the employee data are used in isolation (i.e. without making use of community data initially) as a point of comparison and departure.

Specifically, multiple regression analyses were conducted in which the employees' ratings of the extent of occurrence of the nine influence tactics (as in Table I) were entered simultaneously as predictors of each of the four outcome measures (Table II). Table IV summarizes the results.

Each column of the table corresponds with a multiple regression analysis or equation. In the top part of the table, the *F*-ratio for every equation is seen to be statistically significant. Thus, there is *some* connection between the nine supervisory influence tactics and all four of these outcomes. But what is the nature of this connection? With emotional distress (ED), no single tactic is a statistically significant predictor at $p < 0.05$. The Coalition tactic appears to be most problematic (with more distress being marginally associated with higher ratings of the extent of one's supervisor's displaying this tactic), but even this observation does not tell us why this would be so. With turnover intention (TOI), Coalition again appears to be problematic

	ED	TOI	ACO	ACS
<i>Overall regression equation statistics</i>				
MR	0.34	0.34	0.32	0.78
adjusted MR ²	0.071	0.070	0.051	0.595
<i>F</i> (9, 170)	2.52***	2.50***	2.08**	30.17****
<i>Beta coefficients for predictors</i>				
Rational persuasion	-0.027	0.018	0.157*	0.141**
Inspirational appeal	-0.128	-0.061	0.169*	0.302****
Consultation	-0.128	-0.070	-0.042	0.188**
Ingratiation	-0.010	0.132	-0.184**	-0.085
Exchange	-0.099	-0.195**	0.144	-0.028
Personal appeal	0.050	-0.055	-0.012	0.071
Coalition	0.154*	0.162*	-0.105	-0.112
Legitimizing	0.071	0.096	0.066	-0.042
Pressure	-0.052	0.057	0.106	-0.312

Notes: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$, **** $p < 0.001$. Abbreviated terms are emotional distress (ED), turnover intention (TOI), affective commitment to the organization (ACO), and affective commitment to the supervisor (ACS)

Table IV.
Conventional multiple regression prediction of outcomes from employee ratings of influence tactic frequency

to the same marginal degree, and Exchange is a statistically significant predictor (in the negative direction that indicates less turnover intention with more Exchange). Concerning affective commitment to the organization (ACO), there is again only one statistically significant predictor, although two others are of marginal significance. However, with affective commitment to the supervisor (ACS), the picture is quite different, with four tactics providing statistically significant prediction of the outcome.

The reader may scrutinize these results to identify various possible bases of the associations tied to features of the particular tactics that provided statistically significant prediction. For example, as a possible account for the negative association between Exchange and turnover intention, it could be speculated that the favors or other rewards provided by the supervisor in exchange for compliance are valuable enough to induce the employee to want to remain with the employer to a greater degree than in the absence of these exchanges.

Bringing others' survey data to bear on interpreting the conventional multiple regression analysis

Although speculations of this kind could be productive and ultimately true, interpretations grounded in additional data and theory can be more convincing and useful. To see whether this is so when the community sample data are taken into account, it was necessary first to summarize the community sample data in the form of Table V.

Table V shows the *relative* standing of each influence tactic on each rating dimension that had been administered to the community sample. To arrive at this table, data from the community sample were first averaged across participants (separately for each combination of a tactic and a rating dimension) to produce a tactics' (rows) × rating dimensions (columns) matrix of mean ratings. Then a grand mean (column mean in Table V) was obtained for each rating dimension. Finally, the appropriate grand mean was subtracted from each raw mean to yield the matrix of relative means shown in Table V.

The relative ratings are shown because they will be applied later to data from the employee sample in calculations to predict consequences of supervisors' influence tactics. The raw ratings of tactics may be recovered by adding the dimension's grand mean to any value given in the table for a tactic. Thus, for example, where the table shows a relative value of 2.87 for the Consultation tactic on the Involvement direction,

Influence tactics	Rationality	Involvement	Respect	Directness	Deception
Rational persuasion	2.07	1.43	2.17	2.06	-2.17
Inspirational appeal	2.46	2.03	2.36	0.99	-1.73
Consultation	2.05	2.87	2.70	0.96	-2.48
Ingratiation	-0.41	-0.15	-0.79	-1.69	0.53
Exchange	-0.86	-0.19	-0.09	-0.12	0.42
Personal appeal	-1.15	-0.36	-0.66	-1.69	0.88
Coalition	-1.66	-1.09	-1.79	-1.47	1.51
Legitimizing	-0.21	-1.39	-1.07	0.50	0.47
Pressure	-2.29	-3.15	-2.84	0.47	2.57
Grand mean	5.10	4.56	4.42	5.20	4.08

Table V.
Relative ratings by
community sample
members of influence
tactics on dimensions of
meaning

it is immediately apparent that this tactic received the highest average rating from the community sample on the Involvement dimension. The raw rating may be recovered as $2.46 + 4.65 = 7.11$ (on the nine-point scale described earlier).

The patterns of mean ratings in some of the columns of Table V bear some resemblance to the columns of multiple regression weights in Table IV, though requiring sign reversals for emotional distress and turnover intention (which are unfavorable outcomes). For example, in Table V the first four or five tactics generally show positive or near zero values for their relative ratings (with the exception of Deception which is an unfavorable dimension of meaning); the first four or five tactics in Table IV similarly tend to have the same sign for their regression weights, with these weights in opposition to those for the last four or five weights in the same column in Table IV.

These patterns suggest that behind the “spotty” indications of statistical significance for individual tactics in relation to particular outcomes in Table IV, there may be broader tendencies or processes that operate across the set of tactics to produce the outcomes. One way to describe these tendencies more systematically is by calculating Pearson correlation coefficients between pairs of regression weight columns in Table IV and relative ratings of tactics in Table V. The obtained correlations appear in Table VI. For example, near the top right of Table VI, the value of 0.89 reports the correlation between the rightmost column of beta weights in Table IV and the first (Rationality) column of relative ratings in Table V. This high correlation says that the tactics that had been rated high on Rationality by the community sample were tactics that received high (positive) beta weights in the multiple regression analysis. As with other correlational analysis, such a high correlation also requires that relatively low values on one of the variables (beta weights) tend strongly to co-occur with relatively low values on the other variables (relative ratings). *Unlike* other correlational analysis, the correlation values must be quite distant from zero to be statistically significant, because only nine “cases” (nine tactics) figure into the calculations. The note to Table VI tells the cutoffs for the 0.05 and 0.01 conventional levels of significance in this instance.

However, statistical significance is not the main concern of the findings in Table VI; again it is the pattern of findings that is relevant to gaining insight into effects of supervisors’ tactics on employees. There is considerable consistency in this pattern. The first column of Table VI describes a tendency for tactics to receive low prediction

Dimensional ratings	Outcome variables			
	ED	TOI	ACO	ACS
Rationality	-0.55	-0.31	0.30	0.89**
Involvement	-0.53	-0.44	0.07	0.92**
Respect	-0.61	-0.50	0.29	0.93**
Directness	-0.56	-0.29	0.74*	0.40
Deception	0.54	0.39	-0.25	-0.89**

Table VI.
Pearson correlations
between columns of beta
weights in Table IV and
relative ratings of
dimensions in Table V

Notes: Abbreviated terms are emotional distress (ED), turnover intention (TOI), affective commitment to the organization (ACO), and affective commitment to the supervisor (ACS). With only nine cases (the nine tactics) figuring into each correlation, statistical significance at $p < 0.05$ (*) requires a correlation of ± 0.67 or more; $p < 0.01$ (**) requires ± 0.83

weights (Table IV) for emotional distress when community sample members had rated the tactics highly on Rationality, Involvement, and so forth (with the exception of the unfavorable dimension, Deception). The other unfavorable outcome, TOI, shows a similar pattern. As noted earlier, the signs in this pattern are reversed for the favorable outcomes, ACO and ACS.

A further point about this pattern is that the correlation values in Table VI are especially high for the ACS outcome (commitment to supervisor). This result is not surprising because both this outcome and its predictors (tactics) are specifically focused on the supervisor, yielding a (realized) potential for especially strong associations (seen also in the overall regression equation statistics for ACS in Table IV). Less anticipated is the especially strong connection between the tactics' beta weights for the ACO outcome (commitment to the organization, Table IV) and community sample members' ratings of tactics' Directness (Table V), at 0.74 ($p < 0.05$). In the next section an attempt is made to corroborate this and other noteworthy findings with an alternative analysis suggested by the theorized processes behind tactic-outcome associations.

Scoring supervisor influence tactics in terms of dimensions of meaning

The preceding analyses indicated that influence tactics' associations with outcomes correspond with features or meanings of those tactics captured by the rating scales administered to the community sample. There was a further indication that the organizational commitment outcome was particularly associated with the Directness of tactics, and supervisor commitment was particularly associated with Rationality, Involvement, Respect, and (negatively) Deception, but not Directness (which might, for example, have both favorable and unfavorable implications for Supervisor Support).

A more focused examination of these indications is possible by seeking to predict the outcome variables from a priori scoring of the *overall* extent of Rationality, Directness, and so forth implied by the set of tactics experienced by employees. An a priori basis for this scoring is shown in Table V. The idea is to generate a single score for, say, overall Directness of the tactics used by one's supervisor, through an arithmetic combination of the employee's ratings of the various tactics' frequency with the community sample's ratings of tactics' Directness.

More specifically, a weighted sum for Directness of the nine tactics (as experienced overall by an employee from his or her supervisor) was calculated by the formula:

$$\sum_{i=1}^9 [(\text{Table 5 Directness Rating})_i * (\text{Employee's Rating of Frequency of Tactic})_i].$$

This calculation reduces each employee's nine ratings of tactic frequency to a single score for Directness. Consequently this score is at the same level of analysis and is aligned with scores on outcome variables. It, thus, became possible to examine Directness *per se* as a predictor of the outcome variables (instead of the individual tactics). A statistically significant result for this dimension score would support the presumption that this underlying feature of the tactics – Directness – generates observed outcomes.

A parallel calculation was done for each of the other dimensions in Table V as well.

Predicting outcomes from dimensions of meaning

To produce the next table (Table VII), each member of the employee sample received a score for the extent of the supervisor’s tactics’ Rationality, Involvement, and so forth, calculated as described in the preceding section. Then these scores were correlated with the outcome measures.

The table provides a basis for the claim that underlying features or meanings of the tactics lie behind their associations with outcomes. For example, consider the correlation of 0.29 between deception and emotional distress (at the lower left of the table). It indicates a highly significant tendency for the more emotionally distressed employees to be those who gave high ratings of supervisor tactic frequency to the same tactics as had been rated by the community sample as deceptive or manipulative. As another example, at the top right it is seen that Rationality, Involvement, and Respect are particularly favorable for supervisor commitment, and Deception is particularly unfavorable (bottom right).

The similar patterns of correlations from one row to the next in Table VII is a consequence of the high similarities in the ways tactics were rated for Rationality, Involvement, and so forth. These similarities are apparent in the source data presented in Table V (by observing similar patterns of high and low values from one column to the next in many instances). These similarities would introduce high multicollinearity in multiple regression analysis, so it would not be informative to conduct multiple regression in a manner parallel to Table IV, substituting all dimensional scores for all tactics as predictors. However, the findings shown so far, plus related factor analyses in the earlier study of preliminary data by Michela and Greenstein (in press), indicate that Directness is sufficiently distinct from other dimensions to allow it to be analyzed as an outcome predictor simultaneously with *one* of the highly inter-correlated dimensions (Rationality, Involvement, Respect, or Deception). Because Respect shows the highest correlation value with ACS among these dimensions across Tables VI and VII, it was used along with Directness in multiple regression analyses.

Findings appear in Table VIII. One striking finding is that Respectfulness of tactics “explains” three of four outcomes. Directness, instead, provides significant prediction of the fourth, commitment to the organization (ACO).

One might think that ACO would also be affected by Respectfulness. In the previous table (Table VII), the bivariate correlation between these variables was seen to be statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ ($r = 0.16$). However, the simultaneous multiple regression analysis in Table VIII may imply that this bivariate association is part of a

Dimensional scores	Outcome variables			
	ED	TOI	ACO	ACS
Rationality	-0.29**	-0.24*	0.17*	0.76**
Involvement	-0.30**	-0.27**	0.13	0.76**
Respect	-0.30**	-0.27**	0.16*	0.77**
Directness	-0.25**	-0.18*	0.24**	0.58**
Deception	0.29**	0.25**	-0.16*	-0.77**

Notes: Abbreviated terms are emotional distress (ED), turnover intention (TOI), affective commitment to the organization (ACO), and affective commitment to the supervisor (ACS); * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$

Table VII.
Pearson correlations
between a priori
dimensional scores and
outcomes

	ED	TOI	ACO	ACS
<i>Overall regression equation statistics</i>				
MR	0.29	0.24	0.22	0.74
Adjusted MR ²	0.072	0.048	0.048	0.554
F (2, 177)	7.96***	5.53**	4.46*	109.99***
<i>Beta coefficients for predictors</i>				
Overall respectfulness of tactics	-0.296***	-0.251**	0.076	0.760***
Overall directness of tactics	0.026	0.027	0.181*	-0.048

Table VIII.
Multiple regression
prediction of outcomes
from a priori dimension
scores

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Abbreviated terms are emotional distress (ED), turnover intention (TOI), affective commitment to the organization (ACO), and affective commitment to the supervisor (ACS)

joint association of ACO, Respectfulness, and Directness that is driven by overall favorability-unfavorability or some other common feature within these three measures. In contrast, the simultaneous multiple regression analysis in Table VIII isolates Directness as the only independent and significant predictor of ACO in this analysis. Some possible interpretations of this finding will be considered in the discussion.

Another striking finding concerns the extreme similarities of the magnitudes of predictive power (adjusted MR² in the overall regression equation statistics) between this multiple regression analysis (Table VIII) and the corresponding analysis with raw ratings of tactic frequency (Table IV). By definition, multiple regression analysis seeks a weighting scheme, corresponding to the coefficients, that maximizes the association of a weighted sum of predictors with the outcome. In Table IV with raw data, these associations (adjusted MR²) were 0.071, 0.070, 0.051, and 0.595 for ED, TOI, ACO, and ACS respectively. In Table VIII the corresponding figures were 0.072, 0.048, 0.048, and 0.554. What is striking is that in three of four instances (i.e. excluding ACS for the moment) the weights that multiple regression analysis found for combining tactics to predict outcomes (Table IV) were no better at prediction than the a priori weights from the community sample data that went into calculation of overall Respectfulness and Directness (before using these calculations in the analyses of Table VIII). This observation corresponds to the claim that the community sample data provide insight into the features of the tactics that are salient to employees when they are targets of influence, features that reflect outcomes of the kind considered in this study. That is, the a priori dimension scores explain as much variance as is possible to explain with these tactics and outcomes. Moreover, these explanations are “pinned down” to the features specified in the community sample’s ratings scales; they are not left unspecified and requiring speculation as was noted earlier when results for Table IV were presented.

Although the difference is not huge between 0.595 and 0.554 for the variance explained in ACS when using MR-optimal weights versus community sample a priori weights, it appears to signal for ACS the operation of some other factors than those captured in the dimensions of the community sample survey. This observation is consistent as well with the earlier observation for Table IV that there were four significant predictors when the raw ratings of tactics were optimally weighted to predict ACS.

Discussion*Evidence that underlying meanings explain influence tactics' effects*

Prediction is fundamental to scientific explanation. For example, a theoretical position about the physical universe might predict that a distant star's apparent position will change as the sun's gravitation bends incoming starlight as it passes the sun. Observations under the right conditions (e.g. an eclipse) may confirm or contradict this prediction, thus bearing on the theory.

Similarly, psychological explanation may be accurate or deficient with observation under appropriate conditions. This study sought to explain employees' reactions to supervisory influence tactics in terms of meanings of the tactics inferred by the employees – meanings about social standing (“Am I respected?”), cultural context (“Do people deal with each other directly around here?”), and personal need fulfillment (“Do I have some control over what happens here?”).

In this study the conditions of observation involved a sample of employees whose supervisors varied in their extent of engaging in various influence behaviors or tactics. It was expected that these employees' corresponding variations in states of commitment, turnover intention, and stress would be predictable from how community sample members rated the tactics on dimensions of meaning. This prediction was accomplished most directly in the final analysis (Table VIII) when the meaning dimension data were used to generate employee “scores” for their supervisors' respectfulness and directness. These scores were associated significantly with the employee states analyzed as outcome variables.

This research assumed that members of the employee sample and the community sample viewed the tactics similarly in terms of the meaning dimensions because they were drawn from the same broader culture. Thus, the theoretical implication of the findings is that through encounters with their supervisors, some but not all employees gleaned meanings such as “my supervisor respects me” and “my supervisor deals with me with directness;” subsequently these perceptions were key to the associated states of commitment, intention, and stress.

In contrast, in the initial predictive analysis involving the tactics irrespective of the meaning dimension data (Table IV), although tactics were seen to predict these states, the underlying process was obscure. Later it was seen that even though the method of the initial predictive analysis provided maximum statistical “explanation” of the outcomes from the raw ratings of tactics, nearly equally accurate statistical prediction of the outcomes was possible when the underlying process was, in effect, modeled as inferences about respectfulness and directness by scoring the tactics on the basis of their meanings (Table VIII analysis). Again these observations support the claim that the novel methods of this study were helpful for specifying employees' inferences of meaning from supervisors' tactics as the explanatory mechanism for tactic-outcome associations.

Interpreting the predictors of strain, turnover intention, and supervisor commitment

The study was less successful in tying particular meanings to particular outcomes. Specificity of this kind would be desirable for the greater light it would shed on the processes that generate the outcomes and on management actions to obtain the outcomes.

Analyses before the final one, particularly the correlations in Table VII, indicate that Strain, Turnover Intention, and Supervisor Commitment were associated with *all* of the meaning dimensions analyzed. This finding is not necessarily problematic because these outcomes have many determinants. Still, it could be more convincing from a research point of view to see greater differentiation, predicted on the basis of theoretical analyses of the determinants of the outcomes. For example, personal control may be particularly relevant to stress and resulting emotional distress as an indicator of strain, so involvement (which promotes control) might be seen to be particularly associated with strain. However, in the present context it is equally plausible that disrespect is distressing, and in the results (Table VII) the Involvement and Disrespect dimension scores had equally strong associations with emotional distress.

For future researchers who want to adopt some of these approaches, a potentially fruitful mode of theorizing draws on concepts of need fulfillment (e.g. Steers and Porter, 1983). This is essentially the mode of theorizing used in the previous paragraph and in much of this article: People have needs for control and social standing, and when control and social standing are deficient (i.e. in the absence of involvement and respect), there will be negative consequences for affect, attitude, motivation, and behavior. Michela *et al.* (1995) expand on need fulfillment concepts as applied to stress and strain.

The similar results obtained among some of the dimension scores in relation to outcomes (Table VII) are not attributable solely to the multiple factors that determine these outcomes. They are attributable also to the similarity of how the tactics were rated (Table V) on several dimensions; that is, to less differentiation in these ratings than would have been ideal. These similarities (e.g. between Respect and Involvement, both of which show highest ratings for "Consultation" and lowest for "Deception") make it methodologically or statistically difficult to distinguish some of the meanings and, hence, detect and demonstrate some of the underlying processes that were of interest.

Interpreting the relationship between directness and ACO

A perceptual dimension that was most distinct from the others, Directness, was also the sole dimension that provided significant prediction of affective commitment to the organization in the simultaneous analysis of Table VIII. ACO appears to have some different determinants from ACS and the other outcomes. This effect of Directness would be understandable if the organization itself is held responsible for whether supervisors use appeals that are more direct or less direct. Noteworthy is the relatively high rating shown in the Directness column of Table IV for the Legitimizing tactic, along with the fact that in Table I it may be seen that the wording of the Legitimizing tactic makes explicit reference to organizational policies and practices. If the causal direction is from tactics to ACO, the direct tactics may be cueing the organization's salience or legitimacy (see Tyler, 2006) and heightening ACO in this way. The possibility exists, however, that some causal influence operates in the opposite direction. That is, supervisors might cite organizational factors and might otherwise be direct more often with employees who already hold higher organizational commitment.

In any case, it was reassuring that one of the outcome variables was associated with something other than Respect and other similar dimensions (e.g. Involvement) because, as noted earlier, the theoretical background for this study predicts some specificity among meanings and outcomes.

Strengths and limitations of the study

One methodological strong point of the study was its use of a true random community sample for obtaining information about the meanings of influence tactics. The employee sample, however, was a sample of convenience in the sense that it contained employees in an organization that wished to survey its employees about leadership and related organizational matters. The common acculturation of these samples is relevant to the particular associations found; people in different cultures may assign different meanings and, thus, yield different results. The underlying theory concerning the role of meanings in determining employees' reactions to supervisors' behaviors would still be expected to generalize, if cross-cultural generalizability of psychological processes is assumed.

If researchers use similar methods in the future, they may want to look for occupational or demographic group differences in meanings and take these into account. For example, perceptions of influence tactics might differ as a function of whether an employee works at entry level or middle management. In that event, different matrices like that of Table V would need to be obtained and applied for different groups. In this vein it should be noted that when gender differences were examined in the community sample's ratings of tactics, no significant differences were found (thus justifying the universal application of the values in Table V).

No measures were taken of the extent of employee compliance as an outcome variable, although this has been a matter of interest in some past research on supervisory influence tactics.

It could be considered both a strength and weakness that employees did not assign meanings themselves to their supervisors' behaviors. As noted in the Introduction, it is possible that some forms of "rater bias" were reduced by using other people (community members) to assign consensual meanings. However, some prevalent forms of mediation analysis are impossible in this design, and idiosyncratic meanings may be important contributors to employees' reactions.

Directions for future research

Thus, one possible direction for future research is to obtain data concerning tactics' meanings from the same employees who rate their occurrence and potential consequences in outcome variables. It may then be possible to use path or structural equation modeling on these data, to align statistical tests more closely with the theory. It would still be desirable to obtain additional (and better-sampled) community data so that potential rater bias could be investigated. Measures of compliance also would be desirable.

As noted earlier, questions remain about the dimensionality of perceptions or meanings of influence tactics. Although the sets of tactics and meaning dimensions that we used had solid precedent in the literature, expanded sets should provide more informative findings. It may also be helpful to expand or otherwise revise the set of influence tactics examined. For example, a somewhat different set might reduce the similarities in how tactics were rated on various meaning dimensions.

This article has promoted a *process* theory, which implies that future research could, and should, substitute other relevant content besides the attributes studied here (rationality, directness, etc.). Indeed, the theoretical and methodological approach developed here could be extended to other behavioral domains besides influence tactics – to the extent that there are other domains with common, alternative behaviors by supervisors that are likely to be meaningful and consequential to employees.

Implications for management

Given the wide range of outcomes associated with perceptions or meanings of influence tactics, supervisors should manage the meanings of their influence behaviors. Specifically, to promote a positive supervisor-subordinate relationship, supervisors should be viewed by their employees as persuasive (in the sense of offering rational reasons for requests), consultative (involving employees in matters of the tasks they should do or how they should do them), and respectful in these and other regards. In addition, to promote a positive employee attitude toward the organization, influence attempts should be seen as direct and as consistent with organizational policies and practices (i.e. as legitimate). Most generally, managers should understand that when they exercise influence through behaviors like those that we have listed as the various influence tactics, employees will interpret those behaviors and react to them. These reactions may depend on whether the influence behaviors help to satisfy needs as for autonomy and respect, or whether they thwart them.

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