

## **ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND THE USE OF INFLUENCE TACTICS BY MANAGERS**

**HERMAN STEENSMA**

**SJOUKJE JANSEN**

**CARINA VONK**

*Leiden University, The Netherlands*

### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the relationships between influence tactics of managers and organizational culture. Organizational members filled out questionnaires measuring four cultural values orientations (support, goals, innovation, rules), and nine influence tactics (consultation, ingratiation, inspirational appeals, rational persuasion, legitimating, pressure, exchange, personal appeals, coalition). Four hypotheses on the relationship between cultural orientation and use of influence tactics were tested and received mixed support.

In all organizations, people try to influence each other. It is an explicit task of managers to exert intentional influence over their subordinates. Several specific types of behavior are used to exercise influence. What type will be used, and why? The present study investigates the relationship between influence behavior and organizational culture.

### **INFLUENCE TACTICS**

Influence tactics are ways in which people try to influence the behavior of other persons. Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson were perhaps the first researchers who tried to classify influence tactics [1]. Through the combined use of content analysis and factor analysis, they were able to reduce some 370 influence tactics to

a small number of categories: assertiveness, rationality, ingratiation, exchange, coalition, upward appeal, blocking, and the use of sanctions. Other researchers also arrived at a more or less similar system of categories [2-7], although the terminology used to indicate the categories sometimes differed slightly from the terminology used by Kipnis et al. And, sometimes, “new” categories were added to the list of influence tactics. For example, Yukl and Falbe also used the categories of *inspirational appeals* (i.e., the appeal to values, norms, desirable ideas), and *consultation tactics* (i.e., involving the target person in the process of planning and implementing actions) [4]. In organizations, *legitimizing tactics* are important, too [8]. This is a method that stresses the consistency of the request with organizational rules and policies or plans from higher management. Most research into the use of influence tactics focuses on the use of such tactics in organizations. However, there are also studies that focus on intimate relationships [9], friends and family [10], strangers [11], and intergroup contexts [12].

Many studies of influence tactics focus on *descriptive* research questions. For example, researchers are interested in the differences between tactics; the number of tactics that are used, the frequencies with which different tactics are used by persons and groups in organizations, etc.

Several studies demonstrate that variables covary with influence tactics used by persons. However, the *causal* reasons for these covariations are often neglected. The point has been reached now at which it becomes important to *explain* the “why” of the influencing behavior. Which tactic will be used, and why? Recently, researchers have demonstrated a growing interest in the determinants of the use of influence tactics [see, for instance, 12-18].

Considering the fact that most influence tactics research focuses on the use of such tactics in organizations, it is remarkable that organizational culture has been somewhat neglected as a possible determinant of the use of influence tactics. Organizational culture may be defined as a system of norms, values, and basic assumptions of groups that influence the behavior of people. It has been found already that there is a relationship between leadership styles and organizational culture [19, 20]. It seems logical that there also exists a relationship between organizational culture and the more specific influence tactics selected by people to ensure that they will have it their own preferred way. The present study tries to shed more light on this relationship.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizational culture is a set of core values, behavioral norms, and behavioral patterns that influence the way in which people in organizations behave [21, 22]. An important function of culture is to direct and control the behavior of the members of the organization. Several typologies of organizational values have been developed. The “competing values” model of Quinn [23, 24] is important, since its central dimensions are also found in other models of organizational

culture, developed by De Cock et al. [25], and by the international FOCUS group [26, 27]. According to Quinn, organizations can be oriented toward the competitive position of the overall system (external focus), and/or toward maintenance of the sociotechnical system (internal focus). A second dimension is flexibility (orientation toward decentralization and differentiation) versus predictability or control (centralization, integration). The combinations of these dimensions lead to four organizational models with different values. The “human relations” or “*support*” model (flexibility, internal focus) stresses human relations, participation, cooperation, considerate leadership, mutual trust, group cohesion, and social values. Managers should be empathic mentors and process-oriented group facilitators.

The “*innovation*” (“open systems”) model combines flexibility with external focus. Leadership is both task- and person-oriented; the organizational climate is characterized by openness for change and creativity, the willingness to search for new information, and by respect for experts. The combination of an external focus with a control orientation is known as the (rational) “*goal*” model, with performance-oriented values, task-oriented leadership by managers who act like directors, rational planning, and management-by-objectives (MBO). Finally, the “internal process” or “*rules*” model combines a focus on control with an internal orientation. Hierarchical values and respect for authority are stressed, and division of labor, rationality of procedures, and codification typically covary with strong rules organizations.

One may expect, of course, that dominant cultural orientations will affect the preference for, and the use of, influence tactics by managers. In the present study, several correlations between cultural orientations and the use of particular influence tactics by managers and superiors are predicted.

### **Support Orientation**

*Hypothesis 1. The support orientation covaries with the use of the following tactics: consultation, ingratiation, and (probably) inspirational appeals.*

Consultation is a form of participation characteristic of the human relations (support) model. Ingratiation is a tactic often used to flatter people and to create more cooperation. Considerate leaders stress group cohesion, and inspirational appeals belong the best ways to realize such cohesion.

### **Goal Orientation**

*Hypothesis 2. The goal orientation covaries with rational persuasion and inspirational appeals.*

The goal orientation stresses rationality and reaching goals to succeed in creating an optimal relationship between organizations and their environments.

Rational persuasion and inspirational appeals are the tactics that fit best with such a cultural orientation.

### **Innovation Orientation**

*Hypothesis 3. The innovation orientation covaries with inspirational appeals, consultation, and rational persuasion.*

Studies of innovative leadership had already indicated that innovation covaries with consultation and inspirational leadership behavior [28]. Respect for the knowledge of experts implies that rational persuasion could be an effective tactic.

### **Rules Orientation**

*Hypothesis 4. The rules orientation covaries with legitimating tactics, rational persuasion, and the use of pressure.*

The use of these tactics can be explained by, respectively, the following cultural characteristics: respect for rules and for authority; rationality of procedures; and the aspect of hierarchy, since hierarchy implies more or less the right to use pressure.

## **METHODS**

### **Subjects**

A random sample was drawn from employees of a housing corporation with three large, and very different, departments. All persons in the sample ( $N = 124$ ) received a mailed questionnaire. The response rate was 76 percent ( $N = 94$ ). Questionnaire items measuring the frequency of using particular influence tactics were pulled from the Dutch version of the list of influence tactics developed by Yukl [29]. Top managers of the housing corporation had granted permission to the researchers to send questionnaires to a random sample of employees working in the main departments, but there was a condition: the questionnaire should have a rather modest size. Therefore, it was decided to select two items from each influence tactics category. However, each item is very representative for the influence tactics category to which it belongs. The researchers had indicated, independently from each other, how "representative" each item was, and they agreed in over 90 percent of all cases. Since it was impossible to use the "full scales" to measure influence tactics, it was decided to study the correlations of separate influence items, a method that had been used before by the pioneers of influence tactics research.

## Influence Tactics

Influence tactics were measured by eighteen items, pulled from the Dutch version of Yukl's "Influence Behavior Questionnaire" [29] (Target version, 67 items). The nine tactics, which this instrument tries to measure, are legitimating tactics; rational persuasion; inspirational appeals; consultation; exchange tactics; pressure tactics; ingratiation; personal appeals; and coalition tactics. In the present study, each tactic was measured by two items. Top managers of the organization did not want a time-consuming, long list of tactics. Sample items read as follows:

### *The Manager*

*Legitimizing tactics.* Says that his/her request is consistent with organization rules and policies.

*Rational persuasion.* Explains why his/her proposal is better than the alternatives.

*Inspirational appeals.* Describes a proposed task or project with enthusiasm and conviction that it is important and worthwhile.

*Consultation.* Tells you what s/he is trying to accomplish and asks whether you know any way to do it.

*Exchange tactics.* Offers to help you in the future in return for your help now.

*Pressure tactics.* Reminds you insistently that his/her request has not been carried out yet.

*Ingratiation.* Compliments you on past accomplishments when asking you to do another task.

*Personal appeal.* Appeals to your friendship when asking you to do something.

*Coalition tactics.* Brings along somebody to support him/her when meeting with you to make a request or proposal.

Scores range from 1 ("cannot remember him/her ever using this tactic with me") to 5 ("s/he uses this tactic very often with me").

## Cultural Orientations

The cultural orientations were measured by the FOCUS-95 questionnaire [26, 27]. The complete FOCUS questionnaire with both "*descriptive*" items (i.e., perceived behaviors) and "*evaluative*" items (i.e., perceived values) could be used, since top management of the organization had a special interest in measuring the organizational culture and, in particular, the cultural orientations as perceived by their employees.

After the removal of two items from the descriptive support scale, all scales measuring cultural orientations had high Cronbach-alpha reliabilities. All reliabilities were higher than .75. But since scores on perceived behaviors and

perceived values covaried strongly (all  $r$ 's  $\geq .57$ ) scale scores could be combined to present a more simple insightful structure of the four dimensions (support, goal, innovation, and rules).

### **Background Factors**

Subjects also indicated their sex and age.

### **Other Items**

Subjects had to answer a few items concerning recent changes in the organization.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table 1 contains the correlations between the scores on the influence tactics and the four cultural orientations.

The interpretation of these results is rather straightforward.

### **Support Orientation**

As predicted, support orientation covaries clearly with the use of consultation, ingratiation, and (tentatively predicted) inspirational appeals. However, there is also a convincing correlation with using rational persuasion (scores on both items covary with support scores), and there is mixed evidence for some relationship with the use of legitimating and coalition tactics. The correlation with rational persuasion can be understood by noting that rational persuasion is a tactic that is acceptable in a cultural climate of support: It is not a "hard" influence tactic [16]. Coalition tactics are generally seen as hard tactics, though, and one of the "coalition" items covaried positively with support. However, the item in question has aspects of both consultation and rational persuasion, and is an example of a rather "soft" tactic. (The text of the item was: "The manager tells you that s/he has checked with other people, and nobody has any objection to his/her proposal or plan.") The other coalition item did not covary with support, and is a good example of a rather "hard" tactic. (The manager is bringing somebody to support him/her when meeting the target person.) So, in general, the hypotheses about covariation between support orientation and the use of influence tactics are confirmed rather well by the data.

### **Goal Orientation**

There is mixed evidence for the hypothesized relationships between goal orientation and the use of special influence tactics. One of the two inspirational appeal items correlated, as predicted, positively with goal orientation, and one of the two rational persuasion items also behaved as predicted. There were no

Table 1. Pearson Correlations between Scores on Influence Tactics and Scores on Cultural Orientations in Organizations<sup>a</sup>

Influence tactic	Cultural orientation			
	Support	Goal	Innovation	Rules
Consultation, 1	.38***	.18	.28**	.24*
Consultation 2	.22*	-.01	.09	.04
Ingratiation, 1	.32**	.07	.15	.22*
Ingratiation, 2	.26*	-.08	.08	.08
Inspirational appeal, 1	.32**	.23*	.28*	.23*
Inspirational appeal, 2	.23*	-.02	.04	-.01
Rational persuasion, 1	.36**	.17	.32**	.10
Rational persuasion, 2	.30**	.23*	.26*	.30**
Legitimizing, 1	.28**	.30**	.21	.61***
Legitimizing, 2	.20	.10	.11	.03
Pressure, 1	.19	.22	.10	.38***
Pressure, 2	.04	.21	-.01	.22*
Exchange, 1	.07	-.10	.00	.05
Exchange, 2	.11	.04	.13	-.06
Personal appeal, 1	.17	.02	.09	.04
Personal appeal, 2	.20	.16	.06	.30**
Coalition, 1	.28*	.09	.16	.16
Coalition, 2	.06	.11	.17	.09

<sup>a</sup>For all correlations,  $N \geq 77$ .

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

correlations between scores on goal orientation and other influence tactics, with one remarkable exception: the significant positive correlation between goal orientation and the legitimating tactic, implying that the request a manager makes is consistent with organization rules.

Again, the overall picture is a far-better-than-chance support for the predicted relationships. However, at the same time it must be admitted that the exact form of the influence tactic is very important. Subtle differences between tactics may be experienced as very important by the target persons, giving rise to completely different reactions to the tactics in question.

### **Innovation Orientation**

Hypothesis concerning the relationship between innovation orientation and the use of influence tactics are supported rather well. Innovation orientation covaries, as predicted, with rational persuasion (both items), consultation (one of two items), and inspirational appeals (one of two items). There are no correlations with the other influence tactics. The consultation item that did not covary with innovation measures a rather “worried” manner of consulting (“Encourages you to express any concern or doubts about a plan or course of action that s/he has proposed”). This kind of behavior seems to fit less well with a climate of innovation. The inspirational appeal item that did not covary with innovation shares some characteristics of other tactics, in particular ingratiation, which makes it a less “pure” example of inspirational behavior (the exact wording was “tells you s/he is confident you would do an excellent job in carrying out this difficult problem”).

### **Rules Orientation**

As hypothesized, pressure tactics are used rather frequently in a culture that stresses the importance of following the rules. The hypothesized correlations with legitimating tactics and rational persuasion could be confirmed, too, but in both cases for only one of two items. So here again we have a case of mixed evidence. However, the rules orientation also turned out to covary with several other influence tactics: consultation, ingratiation, inspirational appeals, and personal appeals. In all cases of these unexpected correlations, the covariation was “mixed,” i.e., scores on only one of the two items used to measure such an influence tactic correlated with scores on the rules orientation.

Apparently, managers use a broad range of influence tactics in a culture oriented toward following rules. Perhaps they are aware of the fact that rather hard tactics like pressure, but also tactics like legitimating, may have negative side effects and are not very motivating to their subordinates. This could stimulate superiors to use other tactics rather frequently, too, even though they also make use of the opportunities offered to them by the dominant rules orientation.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

As predicted, there are some influence tactics that fit better with some cultural orientations than with others. This implies that one may expect differences between the profit and the not-for-profit sectors, and the private and the public sectors in managerial preferences for particular influence tactics. For example, many organizations in the public sector are probably more “rules-oriented” than are most private organizations, and in principle this could lead to the more frequent use of legitimating tactics. However, no matter what the dominant



cultural orientation is, there is no one-to-one relationship between organizational culture and applied or preferred influence tactics. This should not come as a big surprise. Managers may select influence tactics for several reasons. Fit with organizational culture is one of these reasons. But other reasons may compete with the *tactics—organizational culture fit* explanation. Personality factors seem to play a role, too. For example, leaders who score high on Machiavellianism [30], seem to prefer indirect tactics, such as deceit, and hard tactics, such as pressure and upward appeals, while they dislike consultation [31, 32]. Also, organizational structure characteristics may play a role, but the relationships with preference for, and use of, particular influence tactics are neither strong nor simple [32].

The “net utility model” seems to provide a good explanation of both the preference for, and the actual use of, particular influence tactics. Tactics with high subjective probabilities of positive outcomes and low subjective probabilities of negative outcomes are preferred and are chosen most frequently by managers [32]. Other factors, such as personality, organizational culture, and the structure of organizations, could affect both the expected probabilities of outcomes and the subjective values of these outcomes. This “net utility” explanation of the selection of influence tactics seems to be applicable in many situations, in both profit and not-for-profit organizations and also in daily interactions between people. But, of course, more research is needed to study the intricate, complex relations between context factors, human factors, and both the preference for, and the use of, influence tactics.

\* \* \*

Dr. Herman Steensma is an associate professor of organizational psychology, Leiden University, the Netherlands. Research interests include leadership, social justice, organizational change, quality of working life, violence in the workplace, and complex decision-making processes. He is the (co-)author of 280 books, articles, and research reports.

Sjoukje Jansen studied psychology at Leiden University, where she also received her master’s degree in social and organizational psychology. Currently, she is working as a manager for the “Rijksgebouwendienst,” the Dutch Ministry of Housing and Construction.

Carina Vonk studied psychology at Leiden University, where she also obtained a master’s degree in social and organizational psychology. At the moment, she is working for the Consulate of Singapore in the Netherlands.

## REFERENCES

1. D. Kipnis, S. M. Schmidt, and I. Wilkinson, Intraorganizational Influence Tactics: Explorations in Getting One’s Way, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 65, pp. 440-452, 1980.

2. D. Kipnis and S. M. Schmidt, Upward Influence Styles, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, pp. 528-542, 1988.
3. C. A. Schriesheim and T. R. Hinkin, Influence Tactics Used by Subordinates: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis and Refinement of the Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson Subscales, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75, pp. 246-257, 1990.
4. G. Yukl and C. M. Falbe, Influence Tactics and Objectives in Upward, Downward, and Lateral Influence Attempts, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75, pp. 132-140, 1990.
5. G. Yukl and J. B. Tracy, Consequences of Influence Tactics Used with Subordinates, Peers, and the Boss, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 77, pp. 525-535, 1992.
6. K. Bennebroek Gravenhorst and J. Boonstra, Beïnvloedingsgedrag van Adviseurs in Veranderingsprocessen. *M&O, Tijdschrift voor Management en Organisatie*, 51:2, pp. 36-49, 1997.
7. H. Hoving, "Leiden met PIT—Inspireren en Innoveren in Organisations," Leiden University: dissertation, 2000.
8. G. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994.
9. D. M. Buss, M. Gomes, D. S. Higgins, and K. Lauterbach, Tactics of Manipulation, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, pp. 1219-1229, 1987.
10. B. G. Rule, G. L. Bisanz, and M. Kohn, Anatomy of Persuasion Schema: Targets, Goals, and Strategies, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48, pp. 1127-1140, 1985.
11. B. Guerin, Social Influence in One-to-One and Group Situations: Predicting Influence Tactics from Basic Group Processes, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 135, pp. 371-385, 1995.
12. J. Bruins, Predicting the Use of Influence Tactics: A Classification and the Role of Group Membership," paper presented at the Eighth European Congress on Work and Organizational Psychology, Verona, Italy, April 2-5, 1997.
13. R. J. Deluga and J. Souza, The Effect of Transformational and Transactional Leadership Styles in the Influencing Behavior of Subordinate Police Officers, *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 64, pp. 49-55, 1991.
14. S. M. Farmer, J. M. Maslyn, D. B. Fedor, and J. S. Goodman, Putting Upward Influence Strategies in Context, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 18, pp. 12-42, 1997.
15. B. H. Raven, A Power/Interaction Model of Interpersonal Influence: French and Raven Thirty Years Later, *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 7, pp. 217-244, 1992.
16. B. van Knippenberg, *Determinants of the Use of Hard and Soft Influence Tactics*, Leiden University, Dissertation, 1999.
17. G. Yukl, P. J. Guinan, and D. Sottolano, Influence Tactics Used for Different Objectives with Subordinates, Peers, and Superiors, *Group & Organization Management*, 20, pp. 272-296, 1995.
18. G. Yukl, H. Kim, and C. Chavez, *Power, Influence Tactics, and Issue Content as Determinants of Influence Success*, paper presented at the Eighth European Congress on Work and Organizational Psychology, Verona, Italy, April 2-5, 1997.
19. J. J. van Muijen, D. N. den Hartog, and P. L. Koopman, Organisatiecultuur en Leiderschap, *Gedrag & Organisatie*, 10:3, pp. 121-133, 1997.
20. K. de Witte and J. J. van Muijen (eds.), Organizational Culture, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 8, pp. 497-608 (special issue), 1999.

21. E. H. Schein, How Culture Forms, Develops and Changes, in R. H. Kilmann, M. J. Saxton, and R. Serpa & Assoc. (eds.), *Gaining Control of the Corporate Culture* (pp. 17-43), San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1985.
22. E. H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, London: Jossey-Bass, 1992.
23. R. E. Quinn, *Beyond Rational Management*, San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1988.
24. R. E. Quinn and J. Rohrbach, A Spatial Model of Effectiveness Criteria: Towards a Competing Values Approach to Organizational Analysis, *Management Science*, 29, pp. 363-377, 1983.
25. G. De Cock, R. Bouwen, K. de Witte, and J. De Visch, *Organisatieklimaat en Cultuur*, Leuven: Acco, 1986.
26. J. J. van Muijen, "Organisatiecultuur en Organisatieklimaat," Amsterdam, Free University: Dissertation, 1994.
27. J. J. van Muijen, P. L. Koopman, and K. De Witte, *FOCUS op Organisatiecultuur*. Schoonhoven: Academic Service, 1996.
28. H. Steensma and F. Pot, Leidinggeven aan Innovaties, in R. van der Vlist, H. Steensma, A. Kampermann, and J. Gerrichhauzen (eds.), *Handboek Leiderschap in Arbeidsorganisaties* (pp. 235-255), Utrecht: Lemma, 1995.
29. G. Yukl, R. Lepsinger, and T. Lucia, Preliminary Report on Development and Validation of the Influence Behavior Questionnaire, in K. E. Clark, M. B. Clark, and D. P. Campbell (eds.), *The Impact of Leadership* (pp. 417-427), Greensboro, N.C.: Center for Creative Leadership, 1992.
30. R. Christie and F. Geis, *Studies in Machiavellianism*, New York: Academic Press, 1970.
31. W. C. Grams and R. W. Rogers, Power and Personality: Effects of Machiavellianism, Need for Approval, and Motivation on Use of Influence Tactics, *The Journal of General Psychology*, 117:1, pp. 71-82, 1990.
32. H. Steensma, "Influence Tactics Used by Managers: A Net Utility Model," paper presented at the Seventh European Congress on Work and Organizational Psychology, Győr, Hungary, April 19-22, 1995.

Direct reprint requests to:

Dr. Herman Steensma  
 Department of Social and Organizational Psychology  
 Leiden University  
 P.O. Box 9555  
 2300 RB Leiden  
 The Netherlands