

Influence Strategies in Buying Centers

Research on influence strategies has typically been conducted in interorganizational settings. In a departure from this tradition, the authors focus on influence strategies used by managers in buying centers. They develop a three-dimensional framework for classifying six prominent influence strategies—threats, promises, recommendations, requests, legalistic pleas, and information exchange. Drawing on this framework, the authors argue that the use of a particular influence strategy by a manager is likely to be related to two classes of antecedents: source and target characteristics. Additionally, they draw on the framework to argue that the effectiveness of alternative influence strategies is likely to vary in predictable ways. The authors investigate the pervasiveness of each of the six influence strategies in a study of 187 purchasing decisions and compare the findings to those previously obtained in interorganizational settings. Findings pertaining to the study's hypotheses provide insights into the relative effectiveness of the six influence strategies and the conditions under which certain influence strategies are more likely to be used.

The concepts of power and influence have been the focus of scholarly attention for several decades (cf. French and Raven 1959; Spekman 1979). In contrast, research on influence strategies that people use to translate power into actual influence is relatively recent (cf. Boyle et al. 1992; Dwyer and Walker 1981; Frazier and Rody 1991; Frazier and Summers 1984). This latter stream of research provides an important complement to research on power and influence by identifying a variety of influence strategies (e.g., threats, promises), and drawing attention to their antecedents and consequences. Our purpose is to build on the contributions of this latter stream by examining three issues that have not yet received due attention in the literature.

First, marketing scholars studying influence strategies primarily focus on those used in an *interfirm* context, such as the one between manufacturers and distributors (e.g., Boyle et al. 1992; Frazier and Summers 1984, 1986; Kale 1986). It is unclear whether findings obtained in this context generalize to other domains of interest to marketers. For example, marketing managers are interested in understanding *intrafirm* decision-making processes, such as those in purchasing committees or buying centers (e.g., Barclay 1991; Jackson, Keith, and Burdick 1984; McCabe 1987; Ronchetto, Hutt, and Reingen 1989). The importance of understanding such decision-making processes has assumed even greater salience because of the growing strategic importance of the purchase function (cf. Spekman, Kamauff, and

Salmond 1994). Studies on the context of purchase committees focus on members' power or potential ability to influence, rather than on the influence strategies they use (e.g., Kasulis and Spekman 1980; Kohli 1989; Spekman 1979). As such, our first objective is to assess the pervasiveness of alternative influence strategies in buying centers and compare the findings with those reported for interfirm contexts.

Second, extant research in interorganizational contexts has identified several source-related variables as determinants of influence strategies. These include variables such as power and dependence (see Frazier and Rody 1991; Frazier and Summers 1986). A buying center context suggests that several additional variables related to the source and the target persons are determinants of the use of alternative influence strategies. For example, group cohesiveness, or viscosity, a target characteristic, may be argued to be an inhibitor of the use of the threat strategy. Thus, our second objective is to identify and empirically examine several previously uninvestigated variables pertaining to (1) the source and (2) the target persons as antecedents of influence strategies used in an intraorganizational context.

Third, the primary emphasis of previous research has been on the determinants of the use of alternative influence strategies. There exists very little research on the consequences or *effectiveness* of each of the six influence strategies. Consequently, our understanding of the efficacy of each influence strategy is limited. Hence, our third objective is to investigate the relative effectiveness of the six influence strategies by relating their use to the actual influence realized by a person in a buying center. (In our study, effectiveness refers to the success in influencing target persons rather than to the correctness of the decisions made by a buying center.)

We develop a conceptual framework on the basis of three key dimensions derived from the literature. This framework permits a richer comparison of the six influence

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TABLE 1
Characteristics of Influence Strategies

Influence Strategy	Coercive Intensity			Task Orientation		Instrumentality	
	Noncoercive strategies	Soft coercive strategies	Hard coercive strategies	Yes	No	Yes	No
Requests	✓				✓		✓
Information exchange	✓			✓			✓
Recommendations		✓		✓			✓
Promises		✓			✓	✓	
Threats			✓		✓	✓	
Legalistic pleas			✓	✓			✓

strategies and enables the development of hypotheses pertaining to their antecedents and consequences.

Influence Strategies: A Categorizing Framework

Research on power, the ability of people, or *sources*, to influence other people, or *targets*, is rooted in the bases of power classification proposed by French and Raven (1959). More recent work argues for a distinction between the mere *possession* of power (the primary focus of previous research) and the actual *use* of power to influence targets (e.g., Frazier and Summers 1984; Gaski 1984). Frazier and Summers (1984) delineate six different influence strategies—requests, information exchange, recommendations, promises, threats, and legalistic pleas—that a source can use to influence a target, and they make a strong case for studying these strategies.¹ They suggest that these six influence strategies differ in two respects: (1) those that are coercive versus those that are noncoercive and (2) those that alter versus those that do not alter a target's perceptions.

We develop this conceptual schema further by suggesting a finer categorization and an extension for comparing influence strategies. This modification facilitates the development of hypotheses pertaining to the antecedents and consequences of the individual influence strategies offered subsequently. Specifically, we suggest that influence strategies may be categorized on the basis of their (1) coercive intensity, (2) task orientation, that is, the extent to which a source's message focuses on task-oriented appeals, and (3)

instrumentality, that is, the extent to which an influence strategy relies on a source's ability to mete out rewards or punishments. The schematic structure of this characterization is presented in Table 1.

Coercive Intensity

The first dimension in our framework that differentiates among influence strategies is *coercive intensity*. Coercive intensity refers to the extent to which a target of an influence attempt feels that not complying with the wishes of the source will lead to adverse consequences for him or her. Frazier and Summers (1986) categorize requests, information exchange, and recommendation strategies as noncoercive strategies. In contrast, they view promises, threats, and legalistic pleas as coercive strategies.

There is little question that requests and information exchange strategies are noncoercive in nature (see also Frazier and Rody 1991). In the case of request strategies, a source merely suggests the action he or she would like a target to take without mentioning or implying any consequences of the target's subsequent compliance or noncompliance (Frazier and Summers 1984). Similarly, information exchange strategy refers to the presentation or discussion of the issues involved. No specific action from the target is sought or otherwise implied by the source.

In contrast, the treatment of recommendation strategies is more complex. The recommendation strategy requires that a source clearly identify and explicitly communicate to a target the particular course of action that he or she would like the target to take. Thus, a target is made aware of the source's preferences and the desire that the target comply with the source. Frazier and Summers (1984) note that recommendations make a source's intrusion into the target's decision-making realm rather obvious. Because a source using the recommendation strategy explicitly states his or her preferences, a target choosing to ignore the recommendation is likely to experience a level of tension, which could be either high or low, depending on the organizational standing of the source. Thus, recommendation strategies appear to entail a certain level of coercion.

Empirical results from previous studies support the notion that recommendation strategies are closer to coercive strategies than to noncoercive ones. For example, Frazier and Summers (1984) found positive relationships between recommendation strategies and threats and promises (coer-

¹Frazier and Summers (1984, pp. 45-47) define the six influence strategies as follows: (1) Requests: "The source merely informs the target of the action(s) it would like the target to take without mentioning or directly implying any specific consequences of the target's subsequent compliance or noncompliance;" (2) Information exchange: The source uses "discussions on general business issues" without suggesting "specific target action;" (3) Recommendations: The source suggests that following a specific course of action is likely to be beneficial; (4) Promises: "The source pledges to provide the target with a specific reward contingent on the target's compliance with the source's stated desires;" (5) Threats: "The source communicates to the target that it will apply negative sanctions should the target fail to perform the desired action;" and (6) Legalistic pleas: The source cites a legalistic, contractual, or informal agreement "that either requires or suggests that the target perform a certain action."

cive strategies), but negative relationships between recommendation strategies and information exchange (a noncoercive strategy).

Similarly, combining threats, legalistic pleas, and promises under a single umbrella of coercive strategies is a broad categorization. Threats and legalistic pleas carry ominous overtones—both state negative consequences if a target fails to comply with the source. In contrast, the promise strategy indicates that a target will obtain certain rewards if he or she complies with the source (see Yukl 1990; Yukl and Tracey 1992). Frazier and Summers (1984, p. 46) also note that promises lead to “net benefits for both parties.” If a target does not comply with the source’s preferred course of action, he or she stands to lose the rewards promised by the source. Although the deprivation of rewards may be considered to be equivalent to the imposition of sanctions, it is significantly less compelling or painful than sanctions, because sanctions leave a target in a worse condition, whereas the nonmediation of rewards leaves the target at status quo. Further support for this argument may be obtained from Kahneman and Tversky’s (1984) work on *loss aversion* in the context of prospect theory. According to this stream of research, people are more averse to a loss of a certain magnitude than they are attracted to a gain of the same magnitude. Thus, the promise strategy is arguably less coercive than threats and legalistic pleas.

In summary, we argue that recommendations and promises both entail an element of coercion—implied in the first case, and explicit in the second—though the coercion is less intense than in the case of legalistic pleas or threats. Hence, we propose a three-way classification of influence strategies based on coercive intensity: (1) noncoercive strategies (i.e., requests and information exchange), (2) soft coercive strategies (i.e., recommendations and promises), and (3) hard coercive strategies (i.e., threats and legalistic pleas).

Task Orientation

The second dimension we propose for our framework relates to the *task orientation* of an influence strategy. Frazier and Summers (1984, p. 44) distinguish among the six influence strategies on the basis of “whether or not the source attempts to achieve its ultimate objective indirectly through altering the target’s perceptions regarding the inherent desirability of the intended behavior.” They categorize information exchange and recommendation strategies as those based on altering the target’s perceptions. In contrast, threats, promises, request, and legalistic pleas are categorized as those not based on altering target perceptions.

The key distinguisher in Frazier and Summers’s (1984) schema is the focus on the *inherent desirability* of a certain behavior. Threats, promises, and requests are clearly devoid of this focus, but this is less clear in the case of legalistic pleas. Legalistic pleas rely on (1) formal laws, (2) an organization’s internal policies, norms, and codes of conduct for its employees, or (3) oral or written contracts between two organizations. Thus, legalistic pleas appeal to the legitimacy, or the correctness, of a course of action and, hence, rep-

resent an effort to influence a target’s perception of the inherent desirability of the proposed behavior.

One approach for addressing this issue is to categorize influence strategies on the basis of their task orientation. We define the task orientation of an influence strategy as the extent to which the strategy focuses on the impact of the target’s compliance on the task at hand. The primary appeal of task-oriented strategies is that a task will be performed better if the target pays attention to or complies with the source, that is, the outcome is inherently desirable. On the other hand, strategies that are not task-oriented attempt to convince the target that complying with the suggested course of action is in the *personal* interest of the *target*. Information exchange, recommendations, and legalistic pleas are three strategies that focus on the merits or demerits of an issue on hand and, hence, are high in task orientation. In contrast, requests, promises, and threats capitalize on their psychological appeal to a target and, thus, are low in task orientation. For example, requests have relatively little task focus, because they do not explain the rationality of the suggested action. Instead, they rely on a source’s goodwill or charisma to persuade the target to perform a specific action (Yukl and Tracey 1992).

Instrumentality

The third dimension included in our framework—instrumentality—refers to the extent to which an influence strategy relies on a source’s ability to mete out rewards or punishments. Promises and threats are high on instrumentality. Rewards and punishments are not integral to the remaining four strategies, namely, requests, information exchange, recommendations, and legalistic pleas (Raven and Kruglanski 1970). Although one of these, legalistic pleas, alludes to the cost of violating norms or statutes for a target, the strategy entails an *emphasis or interpretation* of existing contracts or obligations (Frazier and Summers 1984). The use of legalistic pleas does not depend on a source’s ability to mete out punishments. In contrast, promises and threats center around the source’s ability to award favors or punishments (Angelmar and Stern 1978; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma 1973).

Thus, influence strategies can be classified into two groups—ones that are high on instrumentality (i.e., threats and promises) and others that are not (i.e., requests, legalistic pleas, recommendations, and information exchange).

Factors Affecting Choice of Influence Strategies

Recall that our focus is on the influence strategy used by a person to influence a group of persons composing a buying center, or a decision-making unit (DMU). The influence attempts in such environments are likely to carry stronger personal overtones than those in interfirm contexts, which may rely more on the resources of the source and target firms. We examine the role of an expanded set of possible antecedents that capture, not only the source characteristics (the primary focus of previous research), but also the target’s characteris-

TABLE 2
Hypothesized Relationships Among Source and Target Characteristics and Use of Influence Strategies

Antecedents	Noncoercive Strategies		Soft Coercive Strategies		Hard Coercive Strategies	
	Requests	Information exchange	Recommendations	Promises	Threats	Legalistic pleas
Source Characteristics						
Referent power	+				-	-
Information power		+			-	-
Expert power			+			
Reward power				+		
Coercive power	-	-			+	
Legitimate power	-	-				+
Target Characteristics						
Viscidity	+	+			-	-
Familiarity	+	-	-	+	+	-
Size	+	+			-	-

tics. We describe briefly the two categories of antecedents before developing the study hypotheses:

1. *Source characteristics.* The literature on social relationships offers evidence of the important role of a source's characteristics (including power) in shaping his or her influence attempts (cf. Frazier and Summers 1986; Spekman 1979; Thomas 1982). In the present study, we examine the six types of power delineated by French and Raven (1959) and Raven (1965).² Power refers to a person's ability to influence others' opinions and/or behaviors, whereas bases of power refer to those characteristics of a person (e.g., expertise) that give him or her the ability to influence others (see Gaski 1984; Kohli and Zaltman 1988).

2. *Target characteristics.* A source's choice of an influence strategy is likely to depend on the characteristics of the target at whom the influence attempt is directed (Erez, Rim, and Keider 1986). For our study, the target refers to members of a DMU. We consider three target-related variables

²French and Raven (1959) and Raven (1965) discuss the six bases of power as follows: (1) the extent to which a target is attracted to and identifies with a source for his or her qualities (leads to referent power), (2) a source's ability to access and control relevant information (leads to information power), (3) the competence of a source in the subject of interest (leads to expert power), (4) the ability of a source to offer tangible and intangible benefits to a target (leads to reward power), (5) the ability of a source to mete out tangible or intangible punishments (leads to coercive power), and (6) the extent to which a target is obliged to comply with a source in view of social and organizational norms (leads to legitimate power).

The distinction between reward power and coercive power has long been debated in the literature. Although French and Raven (1959) concede a certain degree of overlap, they have underscored the differences in the dynamics relating to the two. Empirically, there is evidence that targets differentiate promises from threats—the behavioral aspects of reward and coercive power (cf. Podsakoff, Todor, and Skov 1982; Yukl and Falbe 1991). However, the reward and coercive powers themselves likely represent a single dimension (cf. Kohli 1989; Spekman 1979). We develop our hypotheses treating reward and coercive power as distinct constructs, while acknowledging the possibility of the need to treat them subsequently as a single construct based on empirical evidence from the study.

that previous research suggests are relevant: (1) *viscidity*—the extent to which members of a DMU work together as a team as opposed to being fragmented and hostile to each other (Hemphill and Westie 1950), (2) *familiarity*—the extent to which members of a DMU know each other, and (3) *size*—the number of persons composing the DMU.

The hypothesized relationships between influence strategies and their antecedents are summarized in Table 2. We offer the conceptual rationale for these hypotheses in the subsequent discussion.

Source Characteristics and Influence Strategies

We draw on the well-established theory of social power to develop hypotheses concerning the impact of a source's characteristics on the use of alternative influence strategies. A source's characteristics, including, but not limited to, various types of power and their bases, are likely to influence the extent to which influence strategies are used for three reasons. First, a person is more likely to use an influence strategy that he or she believes will "work," that is, actually change the behavior of the target. This, in turn, depends on the source's power base corresponding to the influence strategy. For example, a source with high expertise is more likely to believe that a recommendation strategy will be effective and, hence, will use this strategy more frequently than a source without comparable expertise. Similarly, a source with the resources to reward others is more likely to use the promise strategy than a source with few such resources. Indeed, a power base, by definition, gives a source the ability to exert influence by relying on the power base (cf. Bachman, Smith, and Slesinger 1966; Yukl and Falbe 1991).

Second, the habitual behavior of persons, defined by Stiller (1977) as the learned way of behaving: a pattern of acting, thinking, or feeling that has become routine, occasionally shifting from awareness into automatism, affects the way a person uses influence strategies. Verville (1988) observes that persons exhibit such behavior even when it is occasionally harmful. Because of past successes from using an influence strategy that corresponds to his or her base of power, we expect a source with a certain base of power to be a habitual user of the corresponding influence strategy.

Thus, we expect persons with information power to be more habitual users of the information exchange strategy, persons with coercive power to be more habitual users of the threats strategy, and so on.

Third, the behavior of a person is likely to be shaped by the expectations of his or her target, which, in turn, are likely to be related to the person's bases of power. In general, a source has power over a target only if a target perceives him or her to have that power (cf. Cartwright 1959). A target's perceptions of a source shape the role the target expects the source to play (see Zander, Cohen, and Stotland 1959). Thus, targets may expect a person with expert power to offer recommendations, which may encourage the source to use the recommendation strategy. Similarly, targets may expect a source with reward power to use the promise strategy, thereby, encouraging its use. Similar reasoning may be applied for the remaining types of power and influence strategies. The previous discussion suggests the hypotheses:

H₁: The use of an influence strategy is positively related to the level of the corresponding type of power. Thus, there is a positive relationship between (a) referent power and requests, (b) information power and information exchange, (c) expert power and recommendations, (d) reward power and promises, (e) coercive power and threats, and (f) legitimate power and legalistic pleas.

Our reasoning may also be used to argue that persons with certain types of power are less likely to use certain influence strategies. For example, persons with referent power are less likely to use hard coercive influence strategies, such as threats or legalistic pleas. This is because

- Threats and legalistic pleas made by someone with referent power would lack credibility and, hence, not "work." Furthermore, French and Raven (1959) argue that an influence attempt that relies on a nonexistent base of power may not only be ineffective, but could also reduce the person's power (referent power in this example) for subsequent occasions.
- Sources with referent power are unlikely to be habitual users of hard coercive influence strategies.
- Targets are likely to expect someone they like or admire to use requests rather than hard coercive influence strategies. Cohen (1959) suggests that if the source's behavior is inconsistent with his or her sources of power, the target may not understand the source's actions, which eventually erodes the source's power.

Similarly, persons with information power are, *ceteris paribus*, less likely to use hard coercive influence strategies.

A parallel logic suggests that persons with coercive and legitimate power are less likely to use the noncoercive influence strategies of requests and information exchange. In the case of soft coercive influence strategies, however, the mismatch with the corresponding types of power is relatively small and, hence, we do not offer formal predictions.

H_{2a}: The greater the referent power, the lower the use of (i) threats and (ii) legalistic pleas.

H_{2b}: The greater the information power, the lower the use of (i) threats and (ii) legalistic pleas.

H_{2c}: The greater the coercive power, the lower the use of (i) requests and (ii) information exchange.

H_{2d}: The greater the legitimate power, the lower the use of (i) requests and (ii) information exchange.

Target Characteristics and Influence Strategies

Viscidity. The viscosity of a group refers to the extent to which members of the group represent a cohesive team (see Hemphill and Westie 1950). Viscid groups or DMUs are characterized by mutual trust, respect, and cooperation among the members. These groups are more likely to operate in a problem-solving conflict-free mode (Barclay 1991). In such groups, the use of hard coercive strategies is likely to be viewed negatively by the group members and, hence, reflect poorly on a member who elects to use them. Thus, group viscosity is expected to discourage the use of hard coercive strategies, namely, threats and legalistic pleas (see Shaw 1981; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma 1973). Instead, a group member is more likely to use noncoercive strategies, namely, requests and information exchange. Thus,

H_{3a}: The greater the group viscosity, (i) the greater the use of information exchange and requests and (ii) the lower the use of threats and legalistic pleas.

Familiarity. Familiarity refers to the extent to which members of a DMU are known to each other. When familiarity is low, members tend to be unaware of the personal preferences, motivations, and sensitivities of other group members and, hence, find it difficult to predict their likely reaction to various influence strategies.³ In such cases, a person is less likely to use threats, promises, or requests because these focus on the (unfamiliar) target, rather than on the task, and may potentially jeopardize a source's relationships with the target. Instead, a source is more likely to use task-oriented influence strategies (i.e., information exchange, recommendations, and legalistic pleas) that focus on facts, rules, and reasoning—factors that are generally valued by most people. Thus,

H_{3b}: The lower the group familiarity, (i) the greater the use of information exchange, recommendations, and legalistic pleas and (ii) the lower the use of threats, promises, and requests.

Size. Several studies find that as the size of a group becomes larger, it increases members' conformity to normative group pressures (see Kessler 1973; Saks 1977). The behavior of a person is visible to a larger number of persons in bigger groups. Hence, the person is more likely to behave in a socially desirable manner when he or she is in larger groups than when in smaller groups (Kohli 1989; Ridgeway 1983). Because the use of coercion is not socially desirable, we expect a greater use of noncoercive influence strategies and a lesser use of hard coercive influence strategies in larger groups. Thus,

³We use *familiarity* and *viscosity* as two distinct constructs to capture the target characteristics. Familiarity helps members understand each others' motivations, preferences, and dislikes, thereby affecting the type and extent of the influence strategies used. The familiarity construct is silent about the nature of interactions in a group. In contrast, viscosity is the degree of cohesiveness and team spirit among group members (Hemphill and Westie 1950).

H_{3c}: The larger the group size, (i) the greater the use of information exchange and requests and (ii) the lower the use of threats and legalistic pleas.

Effectiveness of Influence Strategies

The effectiveness of an influence strategy is the extent of manifested influence in a target due to the use of the influence strategy.⁴ Thus, influence strategies that change the opinions and behaviors of a target may be considered to be more effective than influence strategies that change *either* opinions or behaviors only.

Kelman (1958, 1961) discusses compliance, identification, and internalization as the three fundamental processes of social influence and attitude and behavior change.⁵ Task-oriented influence strategies—information exchange, recommendations, and legalistic pleas—seek to persuade a target of the inherent merit of a proposed decision to alter behavior (i.e., internalization). On the other hand, nontask-oriented influence strategies—threats, promises, and requests—seek to obtain conformance with a proposed decision without attempting to persuade the target of the appropriateness of the decision (i.e., compliance and identification). Thus, it is possible that task-oriented strategies may achieve changes in attitudes but not behavior, and nontask-oriented strategies may achieve change in behavior without changing attitudes (see also Yukl and Tracey 1992).

It can be argued, however, that task-oriented influence strategies are likely to be more effective. First, a change in attitude that results from task-oriented influence strategies is also likely to lead to changes in behavior. Second, compliance that results from nontask-oriented influence strategies is likely to be small, because targets are likely to feel guilty responding to such psychological pressure (Kipnis and Schmidt 1988). Third, targets are more likely to resist responding to nontask-oriented influence strategies to discourage the source from using the same influence strategies in the future. Fourth, limited research evidence suggests that the effectiveness of an influence strategy is greater when it is based on reason (Bhatnagar 1993), rational persuasion (Yukl and Tracey 1992), task competence (Driskell, Olmstead, and Salas 1993), and persuasiveness (Yukl and Falbe 1991). Thus,

H₄: Task-oriented influence strategies—information exchange, recommendations, legalistic pleas—have a stronger positive relationship with manifest influence than nontask-oriented influence strategies—threats, promises, requests.

⁴Manifest influence refers to “changes in purchase decision-related opinions and behaviors of buying center members as a consequence of the individual’s participation in the decision making” (Kohli and Zaltman 1988, p. 198).

⁵According to Kelman (1958), *compliance* occurs when a target does what a source wants to gain rewards and avoid punishments. *Identification* occurs when a target does what a source wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with the source. In both cases, the target need not believe that the behavior is appropriate or correct. In contrast, *internalization* occurs when a target does what a source wants because the target believes such behavior to be appropriate or correct.

Method

Data Collection

Our main study involved a mail survey of a nationwide sample of purchasing agents. The sample was generated from a listing of the members of the National Association of Purchasing Management. We mailed a survey questionnaire with a personalized letter requesting their participation to 500 potential informants. The initial mailing was followed by a personalized reminder and a second copy of the questionnaire ten days after the first mailing. The effective potential sample was reduced to 461, because 39 informants either indicated that they were not suitable informants (they had retired or were unfamiliar with decision making in DMUs) or could not be reached because of incorrect addresses. A total of 187 usable responses were obtained for a response rate of approximately 41%.

The informants, all of whom were purchasing agents, were asked to think of a joint purchase decision with which they were familiar. Purchasing agents are actively involved in purchasing decisions and, hence, are likely to be knowledgeable about the type of information needed for the study. To ensure that the decisions included in the study involved some amount of deliberation, informants were asked to select a decision in which no purchase option was the obvious choice of the DMU members. Because the composition of the persons who participate in the different phases of the buying process and the influence of a particular person tend to vary across the different phases of the buying process, informants were asked to focus only on the final evaluation and selection phase of the purchasing process to minimize the contaminating effect of these variations. The products and services considered by the informants range widely, including computers, steel, chocolates, packaging material, cafeteria management services, and weapon systems.

Informants were asked to rate the power, influence strategies, and actual influence of a committee member (excluding him- or herself), as well as the characteristics of the DMU. To ensure variance in the ultimate dependent variable of interest, namely, manifest influence, one half of the informants were asked to report the influence strategies used by a member who had less impact than others on the decision that was reached eventually. In other words, the decision finally reached was more a reflection of other members’ views. The second half was asked about a member who had more impact than the others on the final decision.

Operational Measures

The measures used in our study relied on several sources. Scales for influence strategies were drawn from Boyle and colleagues’ (1992) and Frazier and Summers’s (1984, 1986) studies. We made minor adaptations to the scales, primarily to conform to the context of interest (i.e., a buying center). Manifest influence was measured using the scale developed by Kohli and Zaltman (1988), though we made minor adaptations to eliminate the overlap between two of its items and

influence strategies.⁶ Target characteristics (i.e., familiarity and viscosity) were adapted from the scales developed by Hemphill and Westie (1950). Source characteristics (i.e., the various types of power) were measured with the scales developed by Kohli (1989).

Next, the scales were refined using the 187 responses to the main survey. The reliability of each of the measures was assessed by computing its Cronbach's alpha. We eliminated items from their respective scales if doing so led to a higher reliability of the scale. The items that capture the source's various types of power were factor analyzed to check for their convergent and discriminant validity. All items of a scale should load strongly on a single factor to demonstrate convergent validity and weakly on other factors to meet the requirements of discriminant validity.

Five distinct factors emerged from the factor analysis. Interestingly, items capturing reward and coercive power items loaded on the same factor, which supports the possibility raised previously that these two types of power represent a single, underlying dimension. These items were, therefore, combined to represent one construct, namely, reinforcement power. The remaining items demonstrated high convergent and discriminant validity, with the exceptions being three items intended to capture legitimate power. Two items (1 and 3) from this scale, intended to capture a person's formal legitimate power, loaded on the factor representing reinforcement power. It is unclear whether such loading is indicative of a lack of discriminant validity of these items or the presence of a logical relationship between reinforcement power and formal legitimate power. These two items were dropped to avoid confounding effects. A third (item 2) that loaded, albeit weakly, on the factor representing expert power was also dropped for similar reasons. The remaining two items (4 and 5), which capture a person's informal legitimate power (i.e., legitimate power in the particular purchasing context), load cleanly on an independent factor and were combined to form a measure of legitimate power.

A second factor analysis was performed on the items finally retained to measure the various types of power. The results underscore the high convergent and discriminant validity of the power items. The number of items and their coefficient alphas for all of the constructs are described in the Appendix. The unidimensionality of the reward and coercive power constructs implies that H_{1d} and H_{1e} can be combined. The essence of and rationale for the hypotheses remain unchanged. The modified hypotheses, with the changes italicized, are:

H_{1mod} : The use of an influence strategy is positively related to the level of the corresponding type of power. Thus, there is a positive relationship between (a) referent power and requests, (b) information power and information exchange, (c) expert power and recommendations, (d) *reinforcement power and promises or threats*, and (e) legitimate power and legalistic pleas.

A similar modification is required for H_{2c} :

H_{2cmod} : The greater the *reinforcement* power, the lower the use of (i) requests and (ii) information exchange.

Results

The data were analyzed to focus, in turn, on the three primary research topics of our study: (1) the pervasiveness of the six types of influence strategies, (2) the antecedents of the influence strategies, and (3) the effectiveness of the influence strategies.

Pervasiveness of Influence Strategies in Intraorganizational Contexts

The pervasiveness of the various influence strategies was assessed using scaled scores to account for the differences in the number of items in the various influence strategy scales. (The scaled score for an influence strategy was computed by dividing the absolute score by the number of items in the scale.) The most frequently used influence strategies are recommendations and information exchange (scaled mean = 3.20 and 2.94, respectively), closely followed by requests (scaled mean = 2.68). Legalistic pleas (scaled mean = 1.78) are used to a moderate extent. In contrast, promises and threats are used least often (scaled mean = 1.49 and 1.27, respectively). The mean scores of influence strategies are significantly different from each other ($p < .001$).

There are interesting similarities and differences between our findings and those reported by Boyle and colleagues (1992) for interfirm contexts. First, the pervasiveness of the recommendation and information exchange strategies in *intrafirm* contexts is consistent with Boyle and colleagues' findings in *interfirm* contexts (scaled mean = 3.37, 2.97, respectively). A relatively moderate use of requests and legalistic pleas and an infrequent use of threats are also consistent with the interfirm context findings (scaled mean = 2.35, 1.75, 1.37, respectively). In contrast, promises appear to be far more prevalent in interfirm contexts (scaled mean = 2.58) than in *intrafirm* contexts. It appears that the use of promises is an acceptable form of behavior when interacting with those outside the organization, but not with those within the firm. The relatively rare use of threats and promises in *intrafirm* contexts is likely because of the subsequent reasons:

- As Raven and Kruglanski (1970) suggest, threats and promises may be perceived by DMU members as being unprofessional and insulting.
- Threats and promises may represent high cost approaches, especially if a person's ability to reward or punish is in question. As Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987) and Frazier and Rody (1991) observe, targets respond to coercive actions with coercive reactions. The anticipation of such reactions may lead to "preemptive" restraint.
- Threats and promises may be used by persons generally as a matter of last resort after less coercive strategies have been tried and found not to work.

In contrast, recommendations, information exchange, and requests are, perhaps, less unprofessional, insulting, or likely to provoke retaliation and, hence, are used more fre-

⁶Two of the items from Kohli and Zaltman's (1988) original scale for manifest influence were eliminated, because, as one reviewer noted, they were similar to recommendations and information exchange strategies.

quently. We discuss these strategies in greater depth subsequently.

Antecedents of Influence Strategies

Table 3 summarizes the results pertaining to the hypothesized relationships between influence strategies and their antecedents. The cell values represent the beta coefficients of the corresponding regression models that link the use of each of the influence strategies and the various antecedents. Each model includes the entire column of relevant predictors (those indicated with a plus or minus sign in Table 2). The results are mixed and suggest partial support for the study hypotheses.

There is strong support for H_{1mod} that the use of an influence strategy is positively related to the corresponding type of power. A statistically significant and positive relationship exists between (1) information power and information exchange, (2) expert power and recommendations, (3) reinforcement power and promises and threats, and (4) legitimate power and legalistic pleas. The one exception relates to the use of requests strategy, which was not found to be related to a source's referent power.

The results provide weak support for the second set of hypotheses, which argued that persons with certain types of power are *less* likely to use certain influence strategies. Consistent with H_{2a} , there is a significant negative relationship between a person's referent power and his or her use of hard coercive strategies (i.e., threats and legalistic pleas). However, we do not find a significant negative relationship between information power and the use of hard coercive strategies. Similarly, a source's legitimate power is found to be unrelated to the frequency with which requests and information exchange strategies are used. In other words, H_{2b} and H_{2d} are not supported by the data. An interesting result, counter to H_{2c} , is that reinforcement power is *positively* related to requests. This, coupled with the independence be-

tween referent power and the use of requests, suggests that the motivation for use of the request strategy is somewhat unclear and in need of further study.

Recall that the third set of hypotheses linked the target characteristics—group viscosity, familiarity, and size—to the use of various influence strategies. A significant and consistent finding (supporting H_{3aii}) is that the greater the group viscosity, the lower the use of threats and legalistic pleas. However, requests are used less frequently in viscous groups (contrary to our H_{3ai})—another instance of our inability to predict the determinants of request strategies.

In support of H_{3bi} , group members appear to be more inclined to use recommendations (a task oriented strategy) when they are less familiar with one another. Consistent with H_{3cii} the larger the size of the group, the lower the use of threats. Other hypotheses on the impact of target characteristics were statistically insignificant. Thus, empirical support for H_{3b} and H_{3c} is mixed.

In general, these results suggest that source characteristics are stronger determinants of influence strategies than target characteristics. Furthermore, the lack of significant relationships between requests and information exchange strategies and most of the antecedent factors suggests that noncoercive strategies are used by people somewhat freely, regardless of their resources and the characteristics of the targets.

Effectiveness of Alternative Influence Strategies

An important objective of our study was the assessment of the effectiveness of the alternative influence strategies. Our general hypothesis is that influence strategies have a significant positive effect on influencing targets in DMUs. We regressed the dependent variable—manifest influence—on the six influence strategy variables. In strong support of our hypotheses, we find that influence strategies explain 24% of the total variance in the source's manifest influence on the target ($R^2 = .24, p < .001$).

TABLE 3
Relationships Among Source and Target Characteristics and Use of Influence Strategies

Antecedents	Noncoercive Strategies		Soft Coercive Strategies		Hard Coercive Strategies	
	Requests	Information exchange	Recommendations	Promises	Threats	Legalistic pleas
Source Characteristics						
Referent power	n.s. ^a				-.31***	-.27***
Information power		.22**			n.s.	n.s.
Expert power			.41***			
Reinforcement power	.22**	n.s.		.14*	.27***	
Legitimate power	n.s.	n.s.				.14*
Target Characteristics						
Viscosity	-.29***	n.s.			-.32***	-.34***
Familiarity	n.s.	n.s.	-.15*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Size	n.s.	n.s.			-.12*	n.s.
R ²	.17	.08	.17	.02	.36	.27
F value	5.23***	2.1*	16.8***	1.5 (n.s.)	14.4***	9.9***

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

^an.s.: not significant.

TABLE 4
Effectiveness of Alternative Influence Strategies

Influence Strategy	Hypothesized Relationship With Manifest Influence	Beta Coefficient	t-value
Requests	+	-.14	1.53
Information exchange	+	.00	-.05
Recommendations	+	.43*	4.90
Promises	+	.01	.06
Threats	+	.22*	2.10
Legalistic pleas	+	-.29*	-2.68

R² = .24.

F = 8.36 ($p < .001$).

* $p < .05$.

We further hypothesized (H₄) that though all of the influence strategies are likely to influence the target, task-oriented influence strategies (i.e., information exchange, recommendations, and legalistic pleas) are likely to be more effective than the nontask-oriented strategies. The hypothesized relationships and the regression coefficients are summarized in Table 4.

Of the six influence strategies, recommendations (a task-oriented strategy) appears to have the strongest positive effect on manifest influence ($p < .001$). The threat strategy is positively related to manifest influence ($p < .05$). Interestingly, the use of legalistic pleas appears to be negatively related to manifest influence. We found the three other strategies, namely, requests, information exchange, and promises, to be unrelated to manifest influence.

Discussion

Our purpose was to investigate the use and impact of six influence strategies in intraorganizational contexts. The categorizing framework we developed—based on coercive intensity, task orientation, and instrumentality—enables us to perform a richer comparison of the six influence strategies in terms of the likelihood of use, effectiveness, and impact on targets and tasks at hand. We focused on three salient issues: (1) the pervasiveness of different influence strategies, (2) the factors (antecedents) that encourage or inhibit the use of various influence strategies, and (3) the effectiveness of influence strategies.

Our findings suggest that influence strategies are used frequently, though there is a clear hierarchy of preference across alternative strategies. The pattern is similar to that reported by Boyle and colleagues (1992) for interfirm contexts. In general, the extent of usage in intraorganizational contexts is inversely related to the coercive intensity of the strategies as well as their instrumentality. Noncoercive strategies (i.e., information exchange and requests) and recommendations (a soft coercive strategy) are the most frequently used strategies, whereas threats and promises (high on instrumentality) are used the least. This pattern is probably due to people's reluctance to use strategies that can be socially costly, that is, that can create an unfavorable im-

pression or provoke retaliation from the target of influence in an ongoing relationship. It is interesting to note that promises appear to be far more prevalent in *interfirm* contexts than *intrafirm* contexts. The use of promises as an acceptable form of behavior when interacting with those outside the organization but not with those within the firm may be due to a mind-set that focuses on relationships more than transactions when interacting with others inside the firm.

Our findings pertaining to the antecedents of influence strategies suggest that source characteristics shape the choice of influence strategies more strongly than target characteristics. People make greater use of influence strategies that correspond to their particular bases of power, with the exception of requests, which are used widely without much regard to whether or not the person possesses referent power.

Influence strategies have a substantial impact on influencing the targets—accounting for 24% of the variance observed in manifest influence. However, not all strategies are equally effective. The recommendations strategy is found to be more effective than other influence strategies, which, coupled with the results on the pervasiveness of different strategies, suggests that strategies attempting to intimidate, solicit, or “buy out” tend to encounter resistance from targets. These results have direct implications for managers. They suggest that a manager interested in influencing others is likely to be more successful if he or she uses the recommendation strategy. Recall that the recommendation strategy is a task-oriented and soft coercive strategy—it focuses on the task, makes explicit the desires of the source, and is moderately coercive rather than blatantly so. It is probably this combination of a focus on task, explicit statement of the desired behavior of the target, and the hint of coercion that makes recommendations an effective strategy.

We conducted a post-hoc analysis to assess the relative ability of influence strategies versus power for explaining variance in the manifest influence of a person. We regressed manifest influence on the influence strategies, as well as on the various types of power. The variables now included in the equation explained 39% of the variance in the influence data. In other words, the power variables explain an additional 15% of the variance. This suggests that as in interfirm settings (cf. Keith, Jackson, and Crosby 1990), members in a purchase committee are responsive to both the power of a source as well as the specific influence strategies he or she employs. These results can guide a marketer interested in targeting sales efforts at the persons likely to be most influential in a purchase committee. Specifically, a marketer would be well advised to consider not just the power of the various persons in a DMU of interest, but also their interaction styles and the manner in which they attempt to influence others. Again, it appears that DMU members who habitually try to influence others by using the recommendation strategy are likely to exert more influence than those using other influence strategies. A marketer would, thus, be well served by targeting sales efforts at such persons.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although our study sheds light on the role of influence strategies in purchase decision making, it has certain limita-

tions. These limitations offer several interesting opportunities for further research. Decision making in purchase committees can be a multistage process with variations in the composition of the committee and the dynamics of influence. We asked informants to focus on the final phase of the decision-making process to minimize their burden and obtain accurate responses. A potentially insightful research extension would be to examine (1) whether and how the decision-making processes and styles change over these phases and (2) which persons and influence strategies dynamically gain or lose prominence across the phases.

A second theme worthy of further study pertains to the use of influence strategies over time. Our study does not address the issue of how the past experiences of sources and targets affect the use, nonuse, or effectiveness of influence strategies. For example, it is possible that a person's frequent use of the promise or threat strategy makes that strategy less effective for that person over time (for a particular target). This may partly explain the relatively infrequent use of these strategies found in the present study. This general area of how past experiences shape future behavior appears to warrant additional research.

Our study employs a single informant to assess a group's view of a source, his or her influence strategies, and the group's compliance. This is a demanding task, and the use of a single informant could have affected the level of associations found between the various powers and influence

strategies. It would be interesting to compare results from a future study that obtains data from such informants and the sources being reported on by the informants. Such a research design would also shed light on the possible differences between a source's intentions and the target's perceptions, which may be responsible for the inconsistencies between some of our hypotheses and results. Of particular interest is the measurement of threats and promises, which, as one reviewer noted, might be secret to all but the focal persons, whereas the other strategies might be more open.

The informants for our study were drawn from a diverse range of purchasing situations. It would be useful to study the impact of industry- and product-specific factors on the use and effectiveness of the various influence strategies. For example, what are the differences in the types of influence strategies used in high-tech purchase situations versus big-ticket but low-tech products? What are the differences across product versus service purchases? How do competitive pressures in the buyer's and seller's industry affect the use and effectiveness of the influence strategies used in a company? These are interesting issues that appear to be worthy of further study.

In conclusion, our findings add to the small but growing body of literature on influence strategies. We hope this study spurs additional research on this interesting and important marketing topic.

APPENDIX A

Manifest Influence (Alpha = .91)¹

1. How much weight did the committee members give to his or her input?
2. How much impact did s/he have on the thinking of the other members?
3. To what extent did s/he influence the criteria used for making the final decision?
4. How much effect did his or her involvement in the purchase committee have on how the various options were rated?
5. To what extent did s/he influence others into adopting certain positions about the various options?
6. How much change did s/he induce in the preferences of other members?
7. To what extent did others go along with his or her ideas?*
8. To what extent did his or her participation influence the decision eventually reached?
9. To what extent did the final decision reflect his or her views?*

Referent Power (Alpha = .80)²

1. They disliked him or her as a person. (R)
2. They thought highly of his or her personality.
3. They shared his or her personal values.
4. They identified with him or her as a person.
5. They had high regard for his or her personal qualities.

Information Power (Alpha = .87)²

1. S/he served as a communication link between the suppliers and the committee members.
2. S/he was in direct contact with the suppliers.
3. S/he was responsible for obtaining information about suppliers for the committee members.

4. S/he held independent discussions with the various suppliers on behalf of the purchase committee.

Expert Power (Alpha = .83)²

1. They felt s/he was knowledgeable about the company's needs with respect to the product to be procured.
2. They felt s/he was competent to make an assessment of the various options.
3. They felt s/he knew exactly how the product would be used.
4. They felt s/he had the expertise to make the best decision.

Reinforcement Power (Alpha = .96)²

Reward Power:

1. They believed s/he was capable of getting them pay raises.
2. They felt s/he could help them improve their standing in the organization.
3. They felt it was desirable to be approved of by him or her.
4. They valued receiving recognition from him or her.
5. They felt s/he could arrange desirable assignments for them.
6. They believed s/he was capable of getting them promoted.

Coercive Power:

1. They believed s/he was capable of interfering with their promotions.
2. They felt s/he could take them to task.
3. They felt s/he could make life difficult for them.
4. They thought s/he could block their salary increases.
5. They believed s/he could arrange for them to be assigned to unpleasant tasks.

Legitimate Power (Alpha = .71)²

1. They felt s/he had the authority to ask for their compliance.**
2. They felt someone in his or her job position had a legitimate right to influence the purchase decision.**
3. They felt obligated to comply with him or her because of his or her formal position in the organization.**
4. They felt the purchase decision should reflect his or her preferences because s/he had more at stake than others.
5. They felt they ought to comply with him or her because the purchase decision would affect him or her more than others.

Viscosity (Alpha = .86)³

1. Certain members were hostile to each other. (R)
2. There were certain members of the group who generally took the same side on all issues. (R)
3. There was infighting among members of the group. (R)
4. There was a tendency toward conniving against one another among members of the group. (R)
5. Members of the group worked together as a team.
6. There were tensions among subgroups that interfered with the group's activities. (R)

Familiarity (Alpha = .87)²

1. They knew each other well.
2. They had known each other for a long time.
3. They were familiar with each other's ways of working.

Size

1. How many purchase committee members participated in the final phase? _____

Requests (Alpha = .50)⁴

1. Requested our compliance with his or her suggestion(s) *without* indicating any positive or negative outcome for us contingent upon our response.
2. Requested us to accept certain ideas without an explanation of what effect they would have on our firm.
3. Requested our cooperation in implementing his or her suggestion(s) *without* mentioning rewards or punishments.
4. Stated his or her wishes *without* implying any consequences of compliance or non compliance.

Information Exchange (Alpha = .47)⁴

1. Focused on *general* strategies (as opposed to specific tactics) for making our business more profitable.**
2. Discussed the issues without making specific statements about what s/he would like others to do.
3. Appeared to underemphasize information that could have led the committee to a different decision.**
4. Attempted to influence the committee by presenting information related to the various options.
5. Attempted to change our perspective by looking at how our decisions affect the big picture.

Recommendations (Alpha = .75)⁴

1. Made it clear that by following his or her recommendation(s), our business would benefit.
2. Made it explicit, when making a suggestion, that it was intended for the good of our operation.
3. Provided a clear picture of the anticipated positive impact on our operations his or her recommended course of action will have.
4. Outlined the logic and/or evidence for expecting success from the specific action(s) suggested by him or her.
5. Indicated that a better decision would be made by following his or her suggestion(s).***

Promises (Alpha = .78)⁴

1. Made promises to give something back in return for specific actions on our part.
2. Offered to provide incentives for our agreeing to his or her suggestion(s).
3. Emphasized what s/he would offer in return for our cooperation during the decision making.
4. Offered specific incentives for us to change our positions on certain issues.
5. Offered benefits to us when we initially had been reluctant to cooperate.
6. Stated or implied that those who complied with him or her would be rewarded.

Threats (Alpha = .91)⁴

1. Made it clear that failure to comply with his or her suggestion(s) would invite his or her retaliation.
2. Threatened to become uncooperative if we failed to agree to his or her demand(s).
3. Communicated his or her ability to make "things difficult" for us if his or her specific demands were not met.
4. Stated or implied that specific benefits would be discontinued to committee members for not complying with his or her demand(s).
5. Threatened to reduce his or her support, should his or her demand(s) not be met.
6. Used threats of disrupting the decision making process.
7. Stated or implied that those who did not comply with his or her wishes would be punished.

Legalistic Pleas (Alpha = .79)⁴

1. Made a point to refer to his or her legitimate right to gain our compliance on a particular issue.
2. "Reminded us" of our obligations stipulated in our company's rules and procedures.
3. Used sections of company rules and policies as a "tool" to get us agree to his or her demand(s).
4. Made biased interpretations of company rules in order to gain our cooperation in following his or her view(s).
5. Made a point to refer to company policies when attempting to influence our actions.
6. Indicated that s/he expected others to comply with him or her because of his or her job position.

¹These items were dropped for the same reasons noted in footnote 6.

²These items were dropped per the procedure described in the text.

³These items were dropped to improve the internal consistency of the measure as captured by Cronbach's alpha.

^(R)These items were reverse-scored.

¹Items were scored on a 5-point scale with anchors "very small" and "very large."

²Items were scored on a 5-point scale with anchors "none" and "all."

³Items were scored on a 5-point scale with anchors "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree."

⁴Items were scored on a 5-point scale with anchors "never" and "always."

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