

**INFLUENCE TACTIC AMBIDEXTERITY FOR ACHIEVING PERFORMANCE:
THE MODERATING ROLE OF POLITICAL SKILL***

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ABSTRACT

By tapping into different influence tactic meta-categories, we investigated the variations in subordinates' task performance that stemmed from the downward use of hard and soft influence tactics. We suggest that the combined use of these antipodal behaviors to a high degree, defined as influence tactic ambidexterity, can have a positive and more stable impact on subordinates' task performance than the use of either hard or soft tactics. This study also builds upon previous research by demonstrating that political skill leverages the relationship between influence tactic ambidexterity and subordinates' task performance.

Keywords:

influence tactics; political skill

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INTRODUCTION

Influencing others at work is a key requirement for effective management whilst also bearing a significant impact on performance (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Yukl, 2008). As Yukl (2002: 249) notes, “*the most common form of influence behavior is a simple request based on legitimate power.*” Nonetheless, workers may often perceive such requests as unpleasant, irrelevant, ambiguous, or difficult. Hence, an exchange process, involving the exertion of influence tactics, is required to ensure performance.

Viewing organizations as political entities (Mintzberg, 1985) implies that although performance, goal effectiveness, and career success are partly determined by hard work and intelligence, the ability to alter an individual’s behavior towards one’s objectives requires an effective use of influence tactics (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005a). We view such tactics as purposive behaviors that intend to influence others to carry out specific tasks or requests. Supervisors employ diverse downward influence tactics at work to reduce resistance, ensure compliance, and inspire commitment from their subordinates (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Tepper, Uhl-Bien, Kohut, Rogelberg, Lockhart, & Ensley, 2006). In this context, effective leaders are expected to use a combination of influence tactics that are relevant to the situation and responsive to their target’s reactions.

Researchers proposed a conceptual distinction between influence tactics, based on the latitude they provide the target in choosing to comply (Tepper, Brown, & Hunt, 1993). Thus, tactic strength, which expresses this latitude, can be used to distinguish between hard and soft influence tactics. In general, hard tactics, such as pressure and legitimating, involve the use of formal and coercive power to control subordinates’ actions (Sparrowe, Soetjipto, & Kraimer,

2006). In contrast, soft tactics, such as ingratiation and inspirational appeals, involve mild actions aimed at boosting a target's affective appraisal, thereby enhancing the likelihood of cooperative behavior (Barry & Shapiro, 1992). Ergo, there are fundamental differences between hard and soft tactics, and as such, to be aligned with task objectives, some individuals or situations may require soft tactics while others require hard tactics.

Previous research has evaluated the use of soft or hard tactics in different organizational contexts and their individual roles in predicting critical organizational outcomes, such as compliance, resistance, and commitment (Falbe & Yukl, 1992). Despite the fact that soft and hard tactics have received some attention in the literature (e.g., Farmer, Maslyn, Fedor, & Goodman, 1997; Van Knippenberg, Van Eijbergen, & Wilke, 1999a; Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, Blaauw, & Vermunt, 1999b), especially with regard to their behavioral consequences, the joint use of these tactics has received surprisingly little empirical consideration (Barry & Shapiro, 1992; Falbe & Yukl, 1992). This study seeks to shed light on the job performance benefits that stem from the joint use of these seemingly incompatible behaviors.

We propose that the use of both types of influence tactics may be beneficial, since supervisors have different relational considerations with each of their subordinates (Burton, Sablinski, & Sekiguchi, 2008; Sparrowe et al., 2006; Van Knippenberg et al., 1999b). Albeit different types of tactics may be incompatible when used simultaneously and may undermine the agent-target relationship (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Yukl & Chavez, 2002), our research argues that particular organizational contexts and work situations require both hard and soft influence tactics. We coined the term "influence tactic ambidexterity" to refer to this dual use of seemingly antipodal behaviors to a high degree. This notion is analogous to organizational ambidexterity, which requires the dual management of seemingly contradicting tasks (Duncan, 1976).

Consequently, ambidextrous agents can enjoy the benefits that stem from the combined use of both influence tactic categories. Nevertheless, to fully capitalize upon these benefits, supervisors must possess the ability to effectively understand others in the workplace and adjust their behaviors accordingly. This competency, delineated as political skill, designates which influence tactic an agent selects, as well as its frequency and intensity of use (Kolodinsky, Treadway, & Ferris, 2007). In other words, managers must combine social astuteness with a capacity to demonstrate situationally appropriate behavior under different demands and contexts to effectively achieve their personal and/or organizational objectives (Ferris et al., 2005b).

This study builds upon the existing literature in two ways. First, we examine the importance of combining influence tactics to enhance subordinates' task performance. In so doing, this study contributes to a richer understanding of how agents using these disparate tactics can yield better results. In this context, we initiate a discourse on whether supervisors displaying influence tactic ambidexterity can outperform supervisors relying solely on a single influence tactic category. Second, we investigate the moderating role of political skill on the relationship between influence tactic ambidexterity and achieving subordinates' task performance.

In summary, our study depicts various theoretical and managerial implications by providing new insights into mechanisms for improving subordinate performance. Drawing on a sample of 275 middle managers, we provide evidence that influence tactic ambidexterity can reduce variation in the subordinate's in-role job performance when compared to the use of either soft or hard tactics alone. In addition, we provide evidence for a positive relationship between influence tactic ambidexterity and task performance. Finally, we extend the existing research to empirically demonstrate that political skill can act as a leveraging mechanism on the aforementioned relationship.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Depending upon the context, influence tactics can be categorized as proactive, reactive, political, or impression management tactics. The current study focuses on the proactive tactics used by supervisors to deliberately attempt to influence subordinates to carry out their task objectives.

The Role of Hard and Soft Influence Tactics

The first significant attempt to identify distinct proactive influence tactics was made by Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980), who developed a taxonomy of influence tactics called the Profile of Organizational Influence Strategies (POIS). Building on this research theme, Yukl and Falbe (1990) developed another classification scheme called the Influence Behavior Questionnaire (IBQ), which was further enhanced by Yukl, Seifert, and Chavez (2008) to encompass more influence behaviors. These tactics ranged from friendly attempts to compliment and inspire the target, such as ingratiation and inspirational appeals, to tactics designed to put strain on the target, such as pressure and legitimating (Kolodinsky et al., 2007). While the tactics differ, they also share many similarities with respect to their purpose, scope, desirability, strength, and so forth.

Capitalizing on these similarities, researchers highlighted the usefulness of further classifying proactive influence tactics into broader meta-categories (Van Knippenberg et al., 1999b). More specifically, following the work of Kipnis and Schmidt (1985, 1988), van Knippenberg and colleagues (2003; 1999a) advocated categorizing the proactive influence tactics into hard and soft, according to their place in the strength dimension. Strength denotes the extent to which the use of a specific influence tactic results in control over the situation and the target (Tepper et al., 1993). Other researchers provided a further distinction between

influence tactics and incorporated rational tactics (e.g., rational persuasion) as a third dimension (Farmer et al., 1997; Yukl et al., 2008).

Most negotiation theorists acknowledge the premise that successful negotiators must “*be hard on the problem, soft to the people*” (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991: 54) and need to display both assertiveness and empathy (Mnookin, Peppet, & Tulumello, 1996). In general, different influence tactics have varying degrees of effectiveness (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003). Hard tactics aim at the subordinate’s cognitive side, while soft tactics aim at the affective side. Hard tactics, which lie on the one end of the strength dimension, consist of actions that are relatively controlling, direct, and coercive, such as pressure and legitimating. Their main objective is to ensure the target’s compliance or communicate the agent’s dissatisfaction (Van Knippenberg et al., 1999b). On the opposite end of the strength dimension, soft tactics like ingratiation and inspirational appeals involve polite and friendly behaviors that allow the target the option of whether or not to comply (Barry & Shapiro, 1992).

Employing soft tactics can increase the target’s positive feelings, arouse enthusiasm, and thereby enhance the likelihood of carrying out a specific request (Liden & Mitchell, 1988). Their use can decrease subordinates’ resistance, while increasing their confidence and commitment towards task objectives (Falbe & Yukl, 1992). Soft tactics are considered to be more socially desirable, and they contribute to the maintenance of the agent-target relationship. When subordinates perceive that their supervisors have engaged in prosocial behavior toward them, they will be inclined to reciprocate this sentiment to maintain a positive balance of sentiments in the relationship (Kolodinsky et al., 2007). Consequently, researchers have observed that using a soft influence tactic can be more effective than using a single hard tactic (Falbe & Yukl, 1992). As such, supervisors are inclined to employ soft influence tactics in the majority of their task requests.

On the other hand, hard tactics involve the use of coercive and controlling power to increase an agent's responsibility, accountability, and professionalism. As such, they can increase subordinates' compliance and help sway them to perform as expected. Nonetheless, the use of hard tactics is usually perceived as more hostile by targets (Van Knippenberg & Steensma, 2003) and can place a strain on the agent-target relationship. Therefore, the use of hard tactics requires a sound justification and rationale to prevent undermining the agent-target relationship, which can lead to demotivation and resistance (Van Knippenberg & Steensma, 2003). For example, confronting others face to face, placing strict deadlines, or demanding compliance may be perceived as overly strict, manipulative, or even self-serving. For these reasons, hard tactics are usually invoked after a soft influence attempt proves ineffective, or in cases where the target is disliked or distrusted (Deluga & Perry, 1991). Hard tactics can be considered "drastic medicine" for situations where compliance is needed. Therefore, we argue that although hard tactics can ensure conformity and occasionally achieve a satisfactory level of performance, their employment is more likely to manifest a disparity in performance compared to the use of soft tactics.

Hypothesis 1: Supervisors who use soft tactics exhibit lower intragroup variation in subordinates' task performance, relative to their mean values of task performance, than supervisors who rely on hard tactics.

The Necessity of Combining Influence Tactics

The use of influence tactics can result in both beneficial and disruptive performance outcomes, depending on the context in which they are applied (Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, Blass, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2002). Exerting pressure and seeking compliance in a direct, assertive manner can trigger feelings of dislike. Nevertheless, it can help attain an average level of performance, which may not be possible through the use of soft tactics alone. Under

certain conditions, relational considerations may require the use of harder tactics (Van Knippenberg et al., 1999b) to ensure that subordinates adequately complete their assigned duties, to communicate dissatisfaction, or to boost performance over a short period of time. For example, a tight project deadline may compel a supervisor to shift pressure to their subordinates. Supervisors may also use hard tactics to address negative or counterproductive behaviors or to ensure fair treatment among group members.

In a similar vein, some supervisors argue that being overly friendly and giving increased leeway can sometimes lead to inertia and low performance. With time, supervisors may develop friendships with some of their subordinates. As a result, supervisors may find it difficult to exert pressure when necessary, and their subordinates may rely on this preferential treatment and exert a modicum of effort. Therefore, when an influence attempt fails, a hard tactic is the most commonly used follow-up (Kipnis, Schmidt, Swaffin-Smith, & Wilkinson, 1984; Yukl, Falbe, & Youn, 1993).

The idea of combining influence tactics has troubled researchers in the past (e.g. Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Mnookin et al., 1996; Van Knippenberg et al., 1999a; Yukl & Chavez, 2002). Some scholars posit that soft and hard tactics may be incompatible when used simultaneously on the same person (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Yukl & Chavez, 2002). For instance, when a supervisor uses hard tactics, such as pressure, to exert downward influence, the simultaneous use of a soft tactic, such as an inspirational appeal, could create cognitive or psychological inconsistencies. Nonetheless, several contextual factors and individual differences require the use of a variety of influence tactics from the entire spectrum across the strength dimension. An evolutionary social exchange process (dyadic relationship), with distinct characteristics, exists between supervisors and their subordinates (Burton et al., 2008). Leaders treat members of the group differently, since they need to manage subordinates with dissimilar personalities, beliefs, motives, and attitudes.

According to the leader-member exchange theory (Graen & Cahsman, 1975; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999), some of these relationships evolve into high quality exchanges, while others are based on a more formal, traditional relationship. As such, it can be argued that relationships that are based on high quality exchanges may require the use of soft tactics to further motivate the target's willingness to cooperate, while more traditional relationships may demand the use of harder tactics. The same reasoning applies when different contextual factors come into play, such as tight deadlines or scarce resources, which may stipulate the use of harder tactics to achieve task objectives.

While the combined use of soft and hard influence tactics is compelling, there is scarce evidence as to how the combination of tactics affects the different facets of performance. For instance, Kipnis and Schmidt (1988) observed that shotgun managers who frequently used seven upward influence strategies received less favorable performance evaluations and salaries than tacticians (i.e., managers who relied heavily upon reason and who had at least average scores for the other strategies) or bystanders, who exhibited infrequent use of all seven influence strategies. Studies by Case, Dosier, Murkison, and Keys (1988), and Dosier, Case, and Keys (1988) found that combined tactics could be more effective than use of a single tactic. Furthermore, Fable and Yukl (1992) showed that combining hard and soft tactics could provide balanced results in terms of resistance, compliance, and commitment. Finally, Van de Vliert, Nauta, Giebles, and Janssen (1999) presented empirical evidence that the combination of two apparently different conflict behaviors (i.e., problem solving and forcing) was more effective than the use of either behavior in isolation. Consequently, we assert that appropriate use of both hard and soft tactics, which we term "influence tactic ambidexterity," can enable supervisors to capitalize upon benefits stemming from their use.

Influence Tactic Ambidexterity and Task Performance

In general, ambidexterity is a human trait that denotes an individual's ability to use both hands with equal skill. The term has been used in the management literature to refer to an organization's ability to have a dual focus by balancing seemingly contradictory elements to achieve organizational success (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). In this context, organizational ambidexterity addresses the need for managing trade-offs between conflicting organizational demands by focusing on exploration-exploitation, efficiency-flexibility, and alignment-adaptability (Simsek, 2009).

The context in which ambidexterity is used in this study departs from the traditional perspective, which examines how seemingly opposing strategies can complement one other to enhance organizational outcomes. In our research, the concept of ambidexterity is used to reflect an individual's ability to harness seemingly incompatible behaviors to achieve personal and organizational goals. We label this ability "influence tactic ambidexterity." We argue that supervisors should balance antipodal influence tactics (i.e., soft and hard tactics) to consistently achieve a high level of subordinate performance. Accordingly, ambidextrous agents who exhibit high levels of hard and soft tactics are posited to be able to reap the benefits of each particular influence tactic category, whilst avoiding certain shortcomings. For example, a supervisor who uses soft tactics to increase subordinates' motivation, while using hard tactics to call them to order, would harvest the benefits associated with transformational leadership. At the same time, the supervisor would avoid the pitfalls of inertia and resistance.

Hypothesis 2a: Supervisors displaying influence tactic ambidexterity (i.e., high use of soft and hard tactics) exhibit less intragroup variation in subordinates' task performance than those who rely on the sole use of either hard or soft tactics.

Hypothesis 2b: Influence tactic ambidexterity will have a positive impact on task performance.

The Moderating Role of Political Skill

Pfeffer (1981) was among the first who used the term “*political skill*” to denote the critical competency for successful social influence in various work settings. Sharing a similar perspective, Mintzberg (1985) argued that organizations can be viewed as political arenas, in which worker effectiveness is partially determined by ability (i.e., political skill) and willingness (i.e., political will) to exert influence behaviors in politically astute ways. Political skill reflects an interpersonal style that calibrates behavior to different contextual demands by employing a manner that is genuine and sincere, which inspires confidence and trust, and results in effective influence over others at work (Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, Brouer, Douglas, & Lux, 2007). As such, it has been suggested that “*when those high in political skill engage in influence tactics, they do so in an effective way*” (Ferris et al., 2005a: 13).

The literature acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of political skill (Ferris et al., 2005a), which is reported to encompass four distinct constructs. *Social astuteness* asserts that individuals can comprehend social interactions and accurately interpret needs, interests, and underlying behaviours. *Interpersonal influence* refers to a person’s ability to appropriately adjust his or her behaviour to a situation so as to elicit particular responses from others. *Network ability* is required for creating friendships, alliances, and coalitions. *Apparent sincerity* reflects the ability to display authenticity and sincerity when interacting with others. In general, individuals with a high level of political skill reflect a sense of self-confidence and control, which instills feelings of comfort in others and contributes to positive affective reactions and trust (Ferris, Hochwarner, Douglas, Blass, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2002;

Ferris, Munyon, Basik, & Buckley, 2008; Ferris et al., 2007). Thus, political skill can mask the commonly self-serving character of influence tactics (Higgins et al., 2003; Kolodinsky et al., 2007; Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007).

Supervisors with a high level of social effectiveness are adept at adjusting their behavior to different demands and contexts in order to successfully interact with and influence others (Ferris et al., 2005b). Consequently, politically skilled individuals have the savvy to make better decisions concerning which influence tactics to employ in particular situations and can effectively deploy such tactics in any given context (Ferris et al., 2007). In summary, political skill affects the choice of influence tactics, promotes the self-confidence of the agent in exerting influence, and increases the effectiveness of influence attempts (Farmer & Maslyn, 1999; Kolodinsky et al., 2007). Therefore, politically skilled supervisors that display influence tactic ambidexterity can be expected to appropriately harness both soft and hard tactics to achieve their personal and organizational goals.

H3. Political skill positively moderates the effects of influence tactic ambidexterity on subordinates' task performance.

METHODS

Procedures and Sample

The research was conducted in two sequential phases, roughly one month apart. This data collection timeline was used, since temporal separation of gathering the dependent and independent variables may ameliorate effects of common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The first phase involved measuring all of the independent variables, while the second phase was aimed at assessing the dependent variable (i.e., the subordinates' task performance). To maximize the external generalizability of our research (Breux, Munyon, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2009; Scandura & Williams, 2000), we

collected data from full-time employees, who were alumni of a part-time MBA program at an accredited European Business School. The participants were middle managers working at private companies employing more than 50 employees. Supervisors who volunteered for the survey were required to have at least one year of tenure at the particular company and have more than five subordinates in their sphere of influence, who they interacted with on a daily basis.

During the first phase, a total of 610 questionnaires were distributed to middle managers, who satisfied the above mentioned preconditions for participation. All of the participants were promised confidentiality of their responses and provided with pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes to return their completed surveys. We received a total of 317 valid responses from the first wave of our research, indicating a response rate of 52%. During the second phase of our research, the managers who provided valid responses were contacted one month later to provide ratings for the dependent variable in our study. This second wave of the study resulted in a total of 275 valid responses, indicating an overall response rate of 45.1% for the study.

The average age of the respondents was 35.6 ($SD = 8.1$). Nearly 52% of the respondents were women. The average organizational tenure was 7.9 years ($SD = 6.9$), while the average work experience was 12.2 years ($SD = 8.1$). There were no significant demographic differences between the respondents and non-respondents, and the t-tests for all of the control and model variables revealed no significant differences between the early (first 30) and late (last 30) responses.

Measures

All constructs were measured using multi-item scales. The mean scores were calculated across the items. Multiple scoring protocols (e.g., check boxes, circle numbers, etc.) were used to minimize programmed responses.

Task performance. Three items, adopted from Williams and Anderson (1991), were used to measure subordinates' task (in-role) performance using a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to assess the degree to which their subordinates "Adequately completed their assigned duties," "Performed tasks that are expected of them," and "Met formal performance requirements of the job." All of the items loaded on a single factor and had a high internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.85$).

Hard and soft downward influence tactics. To measure hard and soft downward influence tactics, we formed two influence tactic meta-categories from the extended IBQ (Yukl et al., 2008). Hard tactics were measured on the pressure and legitimating subscales, while soft tactics were measured on the ingratiation and inspirational appeals subscales. The selected influence tactics were captured by adapting four items for each tactic from the extended IBQ. The items were adapted to adequately capture the downward influence in line with the specific context of our study. The selection of these four tactics was based on their relative positions in the strength dimension (Tepper et al., 1993), since these tactics are considered to be antipodal behaviors belonging on opposite poles of the strength dimension (Yukl et al., 2008). Participants answered each question using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (to a very low degree) to 5 (to a very high degree), depending on the degree to which they use these tactics to influence their subordinates to carry out requests. To test the validity of the influence tactic meta-categories, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). All 16 items loaded above the cut-off point of 0.40 to their corresponding latent constructs. The results of the CFA demonstrated a very satisfactory fit to the data ($\chi^2(120) = 266$; $p <$

0.000; CFI = 0.94; NNFI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.067), which supported the selection of these particular tactics to represent the soft and hard meta-categories.

Political skill. Political skill was assessed using the 18-item Political Skill Inventory (PSI) developed by Ferris et al. (2005b). A five-point scoring format was used ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The reliability estimate for the scale ($\alpha = 0.89$) was adequate.

Control variables. In this study we controlled for possible alternative explanations by including various relevant control variables. Specifically, the supervisor's gender, age, and organizational tenure may bias the supervisors' ratings, since these factors may influence the relationship (i.e. liking and perceived similarity) between the agent and target (Byrne, 1971; Wayne & Liden, 1995). In addition, large organizations may mobilize resources to develop flexible training programs or enhanced recruitment processes, or they may provide more incentives (e.g., opportunities for advancement and salary raises), which can have a significant impact on performance. Hence, we accounted for company size by including the natural logarithm of the number of full-time employees within the organization in our analysis. Moreover, we controlled for group size (number of subordinates). Large group sizes involve numerous interactions, which supervisors may find difficult to manage (Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006; Schaubroeck, Lam, & Cha, 2007). To account for the influence of affectivity bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), we controlled for two personality traits, extraversion and neuroticism. Extraversion ($\alpha = 0.75$) and neuroticism ($\alpha = 0.79$) were measured using six and eight items, respectively, which were adapted from the Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, Ernst, & Kentle, 1991). Respondents provided answers that described their psychological state on a scale from 1 (in a very low degree) to 5 (in a very high degree). Finally, we controlled for the use of rational persuasion, which relates to the use of logical arguments and factual evidence to show that a request or proposal is feasible and

relevant for important task objectives (Yukl et al., 2008). Rational persuasion is considered to be a core influence tactic and the most commonly used tactic for influencing others (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Kipnis et al., 1984; Yukl et al., 2008). It was measured on a four item scale ($\alpha = 0.85$) ranging from 1 (to a very low degree) to 5 (to a very high degree).

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

ANOVA Analysis Results

To examine the task performance variation resulting from the employment of different proactive influence tactics, we divided the sample into four groups based on the median cut-off criterion: (1) influence tactic ambidexterity, (2) soft tactics group, (3) hard tactics group, and (4) no emphasis group. The no emphasis group consisted of the remaining respondents that reported a low, simultaneous use of both hard and soft tactics. In order to determine intragroup variation among the aforementioned groups, we measured the coefficient of variance (Harrison & Klein, 2007; He & Wong, 2004). We computed the coefficient of variance, which is also termed relative standard deviation, by dividing the standard deviation by the mean for each group.

Insert Table 1 about here

The results of the analysis presented in Table 1 show that the hard tactics group demonstrated the highest coefficient of variance (i.e., 21.95), followed by the no emphasis group (i.e., 14.17) and the soft tactics group (13.46). The influence tactic ambidexterity group scored the lowest ratio (i.e., 10.94). These results fully support hypotheses 1 and 2a.

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

To reduce multicollinearity, we centered the control and independent variables prior to the creation of the interaction terms (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Furthermore, to assess multicollinearity, we calculated the variance inflation factors (VIF). The maximum VIF within the models was 2.06, which is far below the cut-off point of 10 (Field, 2005).

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for all of the study variables. Table 3 summarizes the results of a hierarchical regression analysis, which tested for significant interaction effects (hypotheses 2b and 3).

 Insert Table 2 about here

 Insert Table 3 about here

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis show that there is a statistically significant positive interaction between influence tactic ambidexterity and task performance ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$), which provided support for our third hypothesis.

The interaction hypothesis, which predicted that political skill moderates the relationship between influence tactic ambidexterity and task performance, was also supported ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$). Figure 1 depicts this interaction based on values that are one standard deviation below (i.e., low level) and above (i.e., high level) the mean. Consistent with hypothesis 3, Figure 1 demonstrates that when there is a high degree of political skill, the relationship between influence tactic ambidexterity and task performance is stronger. We computed the region of statistical significance for the simple slopes. The slope representing

the high level of political skill was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that for managers with high levels of political skill, those who are ambidextrous exhibit better task performance than their non-ambidextrous counterparts.

Insert Figure 1 about here

DISCUSSION

Prior research has argued that the use of various influence tactics can affect performance by enhancing subordinates' commitment and compliance, while reducing their resistance toward undertaking a specific task or request (e.g. Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Yukl, 2008; Yukl & Falbe, 1990; Yukl et al., 1993). In this paper, we examine the impact of downward influence tactics on task performance. As hypothesized, the use of soft influence tactics is subject to less variability than the use of hard influence tactics. Hard influence tactics can delineate the bounds and designate the underlying conditions and principles of behavior for a fertile relationship between the agent and the target. On the other hand, soft influence tactics contribute to developing and maintaining a quality relationship with subordinates.

Taking the research one step further, we observed that influence tactic ambidexterity is positively related to subordinates' task performance. Moreover, influence tactic ambidexterity exhibits less variation than the sole use of a single influence tactic category. Our findings support our theoretical contention that the supervisors' political skill leverages the relationship between influence tactic ambidexterity and the realization of task objectives. At high levels of political skill, influence tactic ambidexterity has a stronger positive effect on subordinates' task performance. Our study represents one of the few efforts to

systematically develop and test the effects of using antipodal influence tactics (e.g., Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Mnookin et al., 1996). The findings of the present study provide theoretical and practical implications and offer novel contributions to the literature on influence behavior.

Theoretical Implications

Drawing on the theoretical underpinnings of influence processes, our study contributes to research on influence tactics in several ways. First, we probe the effect of two polar influence processes on the variation of task related outcomes. Despite the burgeoning attention on the nature and consequences of different types of influence behavior (e.g., Farmer et al., 1997; Van Knippenberg & Steensma, 2003), few studies have differentiated between influence tactic meta-categories, based on their relative position in the strength dimension (e.g., Sparrowe et al., 2006; Van Knippenberg et al., 1999a). Specifically, by examining the variation that soft and hard influence tactics exhibit on task performance, we aim to broaden the understanding of the effectiveness of specific influence tactics. Employing soft influence methods helps maintain the agent-target relationship, and in line with our hypothesis, provides more stable results. The exertion of soft tactics is more socially desirable, which could explain their frequent use in motivating subordinates to carry out specific requests. On the other hand, hard tactics produced a greater variation in performance, which may be attributed to their mode of employment and the target's perceptions of their underlying rationale. Even though hard tactics have been associated with negative outcomes, such as increased resistance and low commitment (Falbe & Yukl, 1992), their importance should not be diminished. When the use of coercive power is adequately justified, it can become a powerful means of asserting downward influence.

Second, we introduce the concept of influence tactic ambidexterity. Ambidexterity has been mainly used in the management literature to denote the critical organizational ability

of balancing seemingly incompatible strategies (Simsek, 2009). Here, we apply the notion of ambidexterity to capture an individual's ability to harness two adverse influence behaviors. By developing the concept that hard and soft tactics are complimentary rather than contradictory, we attempt to account for the fact that prior research on influence tactics has provided inconclusive and to some extent conflicting results (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Yukl & Chavez, 2002). In general, combinations are more effective than the use of a single influence tactic, depending on the potency of each component tactic. Nonetheless, the use of both hard and soft influence tactics has been criticized due to their seemingly incompatible nature (Case et al., 1988; Mnookin et al., 1996; Yukl & Chavez, 2002). Our findings, suggest that influence tactic ambidexterity has a larger impact on task performance and also exhibits less variation than the use of either hard or soft tactics alone. By theoretically integrating adverse influence behaviors, we elevate the importance and the interdisciplinary role of ambidexterity and provide avenues for future research in different scientific fields and levels of analysis.

Lastly, we shed light on the nature and leveraging capacity of political skill. Political skill is a business oriented construct whose multi-faceted nature has only recently been validated in literature (Ferris et al., 2005b). Hence, research on the nature and job-related outcomes of political skill is still in its infancy. By examining the moderating effect of political skill on the relationship between influence tactic ambidexterity and task performance, we highlight the key role of political skill in administering these complementary methods of influence. It has been argued in the literature that politically skilled individuals tactically select the most appropriate methods of influence for particular situations and then show proficiency in the execution of these influence attempts (Kolodinsky et al., 2007). In this context, our research has found that political skill can strengthen the efficacy of influence tactic ambidexterity. We believe that our findings can contribute to the overall understanding of job performance, particularly within a social influence context.

Managerial Implications

The primary practical implication of this research is that effective managers must display ambidexterity in their use of influence tactics. Managers that only use hard tactics to achieve performance can attain their subordinates' compliance, but at the same time they may undermine long-term cooperation. In contrast, managers that rely on soft tactics mould a more stable environment that favor sanctioned exchanges. Nevertheless, reliance on soft tactics may be viewed as a weakness that may lead to inertia (Yukl & Chavez, 2002). Practitioners, however, should also be aware that excessive or misuse of influence tactics can stigmatize one's behavior as non-sanctioned or self-serving (Buchanan, 2008).

Furthermore, our findings indicate that influence tactic ambidexterity can ensure stable results in terms of subordinates' task performance. Even though managers are generally reluctant to use hard tactics, mainly due to their unpredictable consequences, specific contexts (e.g., high environmental dynamism, crisis situations, and increased perceptions of organizational politics) or individual differences (quality of the dyadic relationship) may render hard tactics indispensable. Finally, managers can initially use soft tactics to increase commitment and cooperation, and if their goal is not achieved, then employ hard tactics as a follow-up tactic to ensure compliance. All in all, the joint use of influence tactics is a critical factor for achieving personal and organizational objectives. Therefore, organizations should favor managers that are ambidextrous and can ensure successful implementation of decisions.

Engaging in particular influence behaviors does not guarantee success. In order to ensure that their use will be seen as authentic, justifiable and not self-serving, they must be matched with social effectiveness. Political skill involves both the choice of particular influence tactics, as well as one's proficiency at executing them. Ambidextrous managers with high levels of political skill can grasp their subordinates' interests and interact

constructively with them. Conversely, ambidextrous managers with low levels of political skill are likely to be viewed less favorably, and their behavior may be construed as self-serving, so they should avoid using such tactics (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007). Organizations should fully capitalize upon the benefits of influence tactic ambidexterity by fostering the selection of politically skilled managers and providing training to develop political skills (Ferris et al., 2005a; Ferris et al., 2005b; Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006). Towards this end, commonly used practices involve role playing exercises, drama-based training, and developmental simulations (Ferris et al., 2005a; Harris et al., 2007).

Limitations and Future Research

Various caveats, which provide meaningful directions for future research, should be noted. First, our reliance on data derived from a single source suggests that the findings could be affected by common method variance. Nonetheless, in the context of the current study, which aims at examining downward influence attempts, a single informant, namely the supervisor, is considered to be the most appropriate respondent for evaluating both the dependent (subordinates' task performance) (e.g., Harris et al., 2007) and independent variables (the political skill that he/she possesses and the influence tactics that he/she employs) (e.g., Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008; Kolodinsky et al., 2007). Furthermore, the temporal separation of dependent and independent variables, the control for positive and negative affectivity, and the results of several common method variance post hoc analyses reduced our concerns. Future research could apply experimental designs (e.g., business simulation games) whereby independent observers would extend control for all remaining variables beyond the scope of interest (Yin, 2008) and rate the use and appropriateness of influence attempts in effectively accomplishing particular tasks. Incident studies may be used to assess whether hard and soft tactics should be used simultaneously or whether hard tactics should be used when soft tactics have already failed. These research

methodologies could also determine whether the choice of influence tactics is affected by perceived performance, such as an agent's use of hard tactics following poor subordinate performance.

Second, this study concentrated on two disparate influence tactic meta-categories, namely hard and soft. Each of these categories was represented by two influence tactics. Whilst these tactics were selected for being antipodal and the most representative of the two meta-categories, there are several other tactics in the extended IBQ that merit consideration. Future research could also include additional influence tactic combinations, such as soft with soft, hard with hard, or rational tactics with either soft or hard tactics.

Finally, future research could replicate and extend the findings of the present study in different business settings and contexts. Such studies could examine the effects of influence tactic ambidexterity when deployed upwardly (a subordinate's influence attempts on his/her supervisor) or laterally (e.g., across group members). Furthermore, future studies could investigate the moderating effects that the inner organizational context (e.g., organizational justice, politics perceptions) can have on the influence attempts-outcomes relationship. For example, a negative political environment may expose self-interested influence attempts, thus increasing conflicts and distrust (Kolodinsky et al., 2007). This could have a significant effect on both tactic selection and tactic efficacy. On the other hand, fair and politically sanctioned environments can provide the appropriate preconditions for boosting influence effectiveness.

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TABLE 1
ANOVA for Task Performance

Group	N	Mean Soft Tactics	Mean Hard Tactics	Mean Task Performance	S.D. Task Performance	Coefficient of Variance (x100)
(1) Ambidextrous	37	4.27	3.81	4.07	0.45	10.94
(2) Soft tactics	76	4.17	2.63	3.85	0.52	13.46
(3) Hard tactics	65	3.22	3.91	3.73	0.82	21.95
(4) No-emphasis	97	3.29	2.73	3.88	0.55	14.17

Notes: $N_{(\text{listwise})} = 275$

Test of Homogeneity of Variances: Levene statistic = 6.196 ($p < .001$); equal variances assumption is rejected.

TABLE 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variables	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender	0.52	0.50	-											
2. Age	35.56	8.13	-.16**	-										
3. Organizational tenure	7.94	6.88	-.09	.69***	-									
4. Number of subordinates	6.94	1.74	-.03	-.06	-.03	-								
5. Company size [†]	6.26	1.17	-.10	.18**	.17**	-.02	-							
6. Extraversion	3.65	0.61	.09	.22***	.16*	.01	.05	-						
7. Neuroticism	2.57	0.61	-.01	-.21***	-.20**	.08	-.04	-.24***	-					
8. Rational persuasion	4.24	0.62	.02	.05	.02	-.04	-.02	.03	-.02	-				
9. Soft influence tactics	3.65	0.66	.05	-.09	-.12	.10	.01	.10	-.00	.01	-			
10. Hard influence tactics	3.13	0.77	-.12*	.11	.04	.02	-.04	.08	.15*	.03	-.15*	-		
11. Political skill	3.68	0.46	-.08	.04	-.01	.08	.02	.33***	-.12	.10	.18**	.27***	-	
12. Task performance	3.86	0.61	.08	.26***	.25***	-.17**	-.08	.29***	-.28***	.16*	.22***	.01	.23***	-

Notes: $N_{(listwise)} = 275$
 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$
[†] Natural logarithm of full time employees

TABLE 3
Results of Hierarchical Regression Model

	<i>Task performance</i>							
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3		Step 4	
Gender	.08	(.07)	.09	(.07)	.08	(.07)	.08	(.07)
Age	.10	(.01)	.10	(.01)	.09	(.01)	.10	(.01)
Organizational tenure	.11	(.01)	.14*	(.01)	.15*	(.01)	.14	(.01)
Extraversion	.20**	(.06)	.13*	(.06)	.10	(.06)	.07	(.06)
Neuroticism	-.18**	(.06)	-.17**	(.06)	-.13*	(.06)	-.13*	(.06)
Number of subordinates	-.14*	(.02)	-.17**	(.02)	-.15**	(.02)	-.15**	(.02)
Company size (log)	.04	(.03)	.03	(.03)	.01	(.03)	-.01	(.03)
Rational persuasion	.13*	(.05)	.12*	(.05)	.14**	(.05)	.13*	(.05)
Soft influence tactics			.22***	(.05)	.17**	(.05)	.14*	(.05)
Hard influence tactics			.01	(.05)	-.01	(.05)	-.00	(.05)
Political skill			.14*	(.08)	.16**	(.08)	.18**	(.08)
Influence tactic ambidexterity					.20**	(.06)	.18**	(.06)
Political skill × Soft influence tactics							.01	(.12)
Political skill × Hard influence tactics							-.10	(.09)
Political skill × Influence tactic ambidexterity							.13*	(.14)
R ²	.21		.28		.31		.34	
Adjusted R ²	.19		.25		.28		.30	
ΔR ²	.21***		.07***		.03**		.02*	

Notes: $N_{(listwise)} = 275$

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

All variables, except Gender are centered.

Standardized regression coefficients are reported.

Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

The ΔR^2 values indicate the percentage of explainable level of variance in the dependent variables accounted for by each step.

FIGURE 1
The moderating effect of political skill

