

The Interactive Effect of Influence Tactic, Applicant Gender, and Type of Job on Hiring Recommendations*

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Abstract:

The effects of influence tactic, applicant gender, and job type were examined in the selection context. A male or female applicant used either an assertive, rational, or exchange influence tactic in a simulated job interview script for either a sales representative or cost accounting position. Three hundred four managers, (271 male and 26 female, predominantly white) evaluated the applicant and indicated the likelihood that they would recommend hiring the applicant. Results indicated that tactics were differentially effective in generating favorable hiring recommendations and ratings of the applicant, depending on whether the tactic was used by a male or female applicant and on the job type sought.

Article:

Although researchers have investigated the effect of downward influence tactics for years, they have recently shown more interest in upward influencing tactics in intraorganizational contexts (e.g. see Dockery & Steiner, 1990; Vecchio & Sussman, 1991). This shift occurred as researchers realized that influence tactics not only affect subordinate's perceptions and resulting organizational outcomes, but also shape supervisors' perceptions and subsequent decisions. For example, Schlenker (1980) and Kipnis & Schmidt (1988) found that employees' influence attempts affected subsequent performance evaluations and salary assignments by their superiors. While studies have examined managers' and subordinates' influence attempts, the generalizability of those findings to boundary-spanning situations, such as the selection process remains relatively unexplored.

This study is the first investigation to focus on the selection interview and the effect that applicants' influence tactics have on managers' evaluations of the applicant and the managers' subsequent hiring recommendations. The impact of three different influence tactics—rationality, assertiveness and exchange—are compared in simulated job interviews of both a male and a female applicant who are applying for two different types of positions—a cost accountant and a sales representative. Use of this research design enables us to examine the effects of applicant gender, influence tactic, and type of job and their interactions on evaluations of the applicant and on hiring recommendations. Potential interactive effects of these three variables will be explored in the following paragraphs.

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While a number of tactics have been examined in previous research, Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson (1980) identified three: rationality, assertiveness and exchange to be among the most commonly used tactics which consistently had significant effects in organizations. Shilit and Locke (1982), Kipnis & Schmidt (1988), and Yukl & Falbe (1990) found that rationality, characterized by the use of logic, detailed plans, and information to support arguments was most effective for obtaining desired organizational outcomes. Similarly, research indicates that proffering an exchange, characterized by a willingness to trade favors or offering to make sacrifices is moderately effective in organizations (Bhatnagar, 1993; Yukl, Falbe & Youn, 1993). A third tactic, assertiveness, characterized by using demands, pressure, and insistence, is least effective (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988).

Most previous research has examined the main effect of influence tactics; however, the interaction of tactics with other organizational variables has received less systematic empirical investigation. Preliminary evidence indicates that the influencer's gender plays an important role in a tactic's effectiveness. Assertiveness is generally considered acceptable, even expected in males, consistent with gender stereotypes (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson & Rosenkrantz, 1972), while for females, assertiveness may be perceived negatively. For example, Johnson & Scandura (1994) found that assertive male accountants received higher salaries than assertive female colleagues. Thus, assertiveness as a tactic, may be more effective for male than for female applicants.

Research of the rational and exchange tactics has yielded inconclusive evidence. Dreyer, Dougherty & Whitely (1988) found that the rational tactic was associated with higher salaries for women than was the exchange approach. On the other hand, Kipnis & Schmidt found that for women, those using exchange tactics received the highest performance evaluations, while among men, the rational approach led to the highest ratings. This stream of research suggests that there may be an interactive effect of gender and influence tactic. This study examines the interactive effect of gender and tactic on evaluations of the applicant and hiring recommendations.

There is also evidence that recruiters have reliable and well-differentiated conceptions of the requisite personality attributes for various occupational groups (Jackson, Peacock, & Holden, 1982) and that these conceptions are used in selection decisions (Paunonen, Jackson, & Oberman, 1987). This research suggests that applicants could improve their chance of being selected by utilizing influence tactics consonant with personality attributes sought by recruiters attempting to fill specific positions. For example, an applicant using a rational tactic may be perceived as best suited for a cost accounting position which is considered to require a logical, rational mindset. On the other hand, an applicant using an assertive tactic may be seen as best suited for a sales representative position which requires actively pursuing new business for the firm. Following this line of reasoning, we predicted a two-way interaction such that an applicant using a rational influence tactic would be preferred for the cost accounting position while an applicant using the assertive tactic would be preferred for the sales representative position.

In summary, based on the literature review, the interactive effects of applicant gender and influence tactic and of influence tactic and job type were explored.

METHOD

This study consisted of a 2 x 3 x 2 design in which a male or female job applicant used one of three influence tactics in an interview for a selling or cost accounting position.

Sample

Respondents were randomly selected from Standard & Poor's listing of U.S. corporate executives in companies with over 250 employees. Four hundred marketing executives received packages simulating a sales representative position interview and four hundred controllers received similar packages for a cost accounting position interview. Of the respondents, 150 were marketing executives and 154 were controllers; 89.1% were male and 8.6% were female; average age was 45.1 years; respondents had hired 4.9 employees on average in the last year; and respondents' company sales averaged \$54,732,89 compared with \$30,134,810 for companies in the S&P listing. While demographic data with respect to the race of participants were not collected during the study, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1991) data on the racial profile of managers in the United States suggests that the sample was predominantly white.

Instrument and Procedure

The simulation package included: (a) a cover letter explaining the study's purpose, (b) a four-page survey instrument which realistically approximated a job interview; and (c) a one-page questionnaire. The survey instrument included short descriptions of the company and the position, an abbreviated applicant resume and a two page script excerpting parts of the interview. Managers were asked to read the survey and to provide: (1) evaluations of the applicant's personality, (2) the likelihood that they would recommend hiring the applicant, and (3) demographic information about themselves and their company. Potential respondents who did not reply within three weeks-received a second package.

Independent Variables. The three independent variables were: (a) applicant gender, (b) the applicant's influence strategy, and (c) the job descriptions. Gender was unobtrusively manipulated using line drawings. Half of the packages showed a male applicant and the other half a female applicant with all other identifying features of the applicant being identical— same name and work experience. Use of line drawings avoided the confounding interactive effects of attractiveness and gender identified by Heilman & Stopeck (1985).

The three most commonly used influence tactics, rationality, exchange and assertiveness, were used in this study. The manipulations were taken from descriptions of the tactics developed and tested by Kipnis, Schmidt & Wilkinson (1980) and later validated by Schriesheim & Hinkin (1990). In each version of the simulation, applicants used the tactic three times. For example, the applicant using rationality explained how s/he had used logic to solve a problem in a previous position, described his/her problem-solving strategy, and reiterated her/his qualifications for the position at the interview's conclusion. The applicant using the exchange strategy had adjusted his/her schedule for the interviewer's benefit, showed adaptability by offering, if hired, to attend additional computer training and offered to give up a summer trip to begin work at the company's convenience. Finally, the applicant using the assertive strategy had called to set up the interview, described how she/he had shown initiative in a previous position, and asked for a deadline by which the hiring decision would be made.

Job descriptions were developed using the literature on occupational descriptions (Dalrymple, 1985; Dubinsky & Ingram, 1983) and by consulting with marketing and accounting managers with experience in hiring for these positions.

Dependent Variables. Respondents rated the applicant's self-motivation, competence, independence, and self-confidence on a ten-point scale ranging from extremely low (0) to extremely high (9). Likelihood of hiring was indicated with percentages, 0 to 100%.

RESULTS

Table I shows the intercorrelations among the dependent variables. Because of the high intercorrelations among the ratings of the applicant, factor analysis was employed. One factor with loadings of .67 for competence, .78 for motivation, .76 for independence and .74 for self-confidence emerged. This factor was labeled "Capability", and the factor scores were used in subsequent analyses.

Manipulation Check

To test the manipulation of the influence strategies, subjects rated the applicant's assertiveness, logicalness and flexibility using a ten point scale. For the rational and exchange strategies, the terms, logical and flexible,

Table I. Intercorrelations Among the Dependent Variables: Evaluations of the Applicant and Likelihood of Recommending Hiring^{a,b}

Dependent Variables	\bar{x}	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Competence	6.27	1.00				
(2) Self-motivation	7.50	.40	1.00			
(3) Independence	6.91	.30	.49	1.00		
(4) Self-confidence	7.56	.35	.39	.45	1.00	
(5) Likelihood of recommending hiring (%)	66.20	.51	.41	.32	.26	1.00

^aAll correlations are significant at $p < .0001$.

^b $n = 304$.

were used to avoid sensitizing respondents to the influence strategies. Because assertiveness is a term widely-used in describing sales persons, that influence strategy was not disguised.

All three manipulation checks were successful. For the assertive strategy, analysis of variance ($F = 21.94$, $p < .0001$) and a subsequent Scheffe test for simple effects ($F = 3.03$, $p < .05$) indicated that applicants using that tactic were rated as more assertive ($\bar{t}_1 = 7.66$) than applicants using rationality ($X = 7.23$) or exchange = 6.59). For the rationality strategy, analysis of variance ($F = 10.48$, $p < .0001$) and the subsequent Scheffe test ($F = 3.06$, $p < .05$) indicated that applicants using that tactic were rated more logical ($\bar{t}_2 = 7.37$) than the applicants using assertiveness ($X = 6.45$) or exchange ($t_3 = 6.25$). Finally, applicants using the exchange strategy were significantly more flexible = 7.24, ANOVA: $F = 43.35$, $p < .0001$) than applicants using the rational ($t_4 = 5.16$) or assertive tactics = 5.57) according to the Scheffe test ($F = 3.03$, $p < .05$). MANOVA, which was used to test the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables while

controlling for experiment-wise error revealed a significant result ($F = 1.75$, $p < .006$). In subsequent analysis of variance, as predicted, there were interactive effects on the dependent variables as explained below.

Analysis of variance, using the general linear model procedure in SAS to account for the unbalanced design, revealed a significant two-way interaction of applicant gender and influence tactic on hiring recommendations. ($F = 4.95$, $p < .01$). As Fig. 1 show, the "assertive male" and the "rational

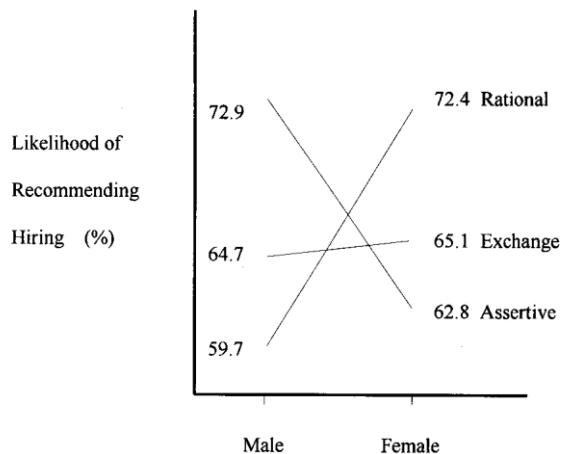


Fig. 1. Interaction effect of influence tactic and applicant gender on the likelihood of recommending hiring.

female" were more likely to be hired, while the "rational male" and the "assertive female" were least likely to be hired.

The results of testing the interactive effect of influence tactic and job type are shown in Table II and Fig. 2. Both variables significantly affected evaluations of the applicant's capability ($F = 3.01$, $p < .05$) and hiring recommendations ($F = 4.09$, $p < .02$). The illustrations indicate that, as predicted, the assertive tactic results in the strongest evaluation of capability and the greatest likelihood of being hired in the sales position and

Table II. Interactive Effect of Influence Tactic and Job Type on Evaluations of the Applicant^a

Influence Tactic	Type of Job	
	Sales Representative	Cost Accountant
Assertive	.44	.02
Exchange	-.25	-.40
Rational	.07	.21

^aAs measured by the "Capability" Factor.

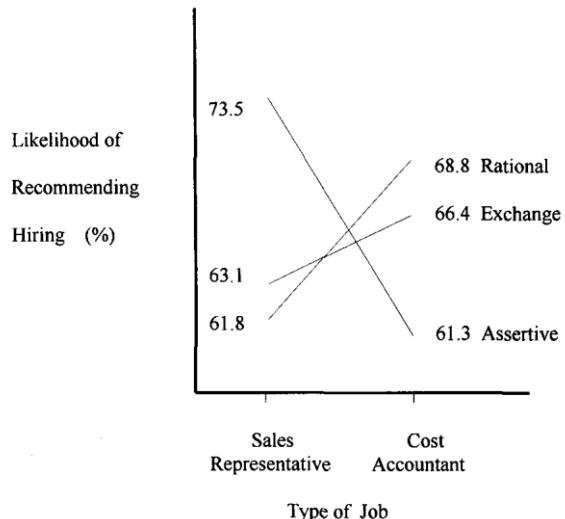


Fig. 2. Interactive effect of influence tactic and job type on the likelihood of recommending hiring.

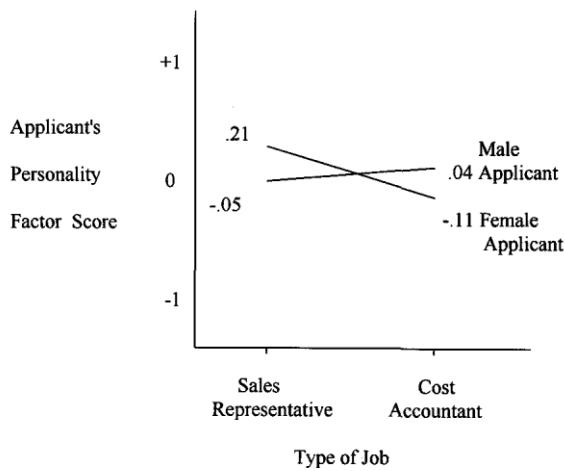


Fig. 3. Interactive effect of applicant gender and job type on evaluations of the applicant's capability.

rationality led to the strongest capability rating and the strongest hiring recommendation for the cost accounting position.

Finally, there was a significant interaction between job type and applicant gender on evaluation of the applicant's capability ($F = 4.04$, $p < .05$). As Fig. 3 shows, the male applicant for the cost accounting position and the female applicant for the sales position were rated more favorably on capability. There was no significant three-way interaction.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to examine the interactive effects of applicant gender, influence tactics, and job type on managers' evaluations of the applicant's capability and on

hiring recommendations. The results suggest that the effect of influence tactics interacts with other variables to affect selection decisions.

In the selection context of this study, tactics were differentially effective depending on whether they were used by a male or a female applicant. Consistent with sex-role stereotype, the assertive tactic was most likely to lead to a favorable hiring recommendation for the male applicant. These results are consistent with Johnson & Scandura's (1994) finding that assertive males received higher salaries than their assertive female colleagues.

The results further suggest that female applicants are more likely to receive a job offer when they use an unemotional, rational approach in the employment interview. The unexpected performance of the female applicant using a rational approach may have led the managerial participants to make a stronger hiring recommendation. This explanation is consistent with the findings of Bigoness (1976) and Hamner, Kim, Baird, & Bigoness (1974), who found that (unexpectedly) high-performing females were rated more positively and seen as more deserving of a reward than comparably performing males. In the case of women, use of the rational tactic conveys the impression that they possess the logical, rational frame of mind that fits best with the rational, orderly bureaucratic organizational structure. The findings that the female applicant using a rational approach received the most favorable hiring recommendation is also consistent with Dreyer, et al's (1988) results. Perhaps it is important for women to demonstrate their ability to conform to the rational corporate mold by utilizing a rationality tactic in employment interviews.

Consistent with the research on intraorganizational influence attempts, influence attempts in this study were differentially effective in a boundary spanning situation, the selection interview, depending on the context (job sought) and the gender of the applicant. Past research has examined the effect of upward influence tactics in organizational contexts such as performance evaluation (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988), and subordinate attempts to gain desired organizational outcomes including pay raises (Dreher, et al, 1988; Shilit & Locke, 1982). In each context, different tactics emerged as most effective for obtaining desired results. The present study used a third context, the selection process. Taking the three studies together, it appears that a tactic's effectiveness may also be a function of the context in which it is used. The effect of the influence context has yet to be systematically explored.

Vecchio & Sussman (1991) found limited evidence that the evaluator's gender affected the choice of influence tactic used within the organization. It may be that there are gender differences in preferences for influence tactics and that these preferences could affect hiring decisions in the selection context as well. Future research could explore this possibility.*

There are several factors which affect the quality of research. One factor is the strength of the methodology. The use of scripts in the present study eliminated the effects of extraneous variables, such as the applicant's appearance and demeanor. Second, while other potential variables were controlled, only the variables of interest: gender, tactic, and job were manipulated to determine their pure effect on hiring recommendations. Another issue in research is the representativeness of the sample used. The participant managers dealt only with positions in their

* The authors would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

functional area and they regularly make hiring decisions as part of their jobs. Analysis of the sample in this study indicated that participants were representative of the population of companies listed by Standard & Poor from which they were drawn in terms of company size.

By extending the research on upward influence tactics to the employment interview, this study indicates that men and women should utilize different influence tactics in order to gain employment. Job applicants should also be aware that use of tactics can influence managers' assessments of their fitness for a particular job. Recruiters should be aware that tactics used by job applicants may or may not reflect the applicant's capability and potential and that the use of these tactics may indirectly affect the recruiter's hiring recommendations.

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