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Achinoam Tal Joseph Schwarzwald Meni Koslowsky

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Power preference of bank managers in conflicts with subordinates

Achinoam Tal, Joseph Schwarzwald and Meni Koslowsky
Department of Psychology, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine supervisors' power preference (harsh/soft) for gaining compliance from subordinates in conflict situations using the updated Power Interaction Model (Koslowsky and Schwarzwald, 2009). The model assumes that the relationship between antecedents and power preference is mediated by cost/benefit considerations.

Design/methodology/approach – Four considerations were examined as mediators: acquiescence, relations, worker growth and conformity. A sample of 120 bank managers was given one of several conflict scenarios differing on severity (low/high) and subordinate worker's performance ability (low/average/high). In addition, managers' leadership style and organizational commitment were assessed.

Findings – For the two manipulated variables, conflict (high significance, low significance) and worker performance (high, average, low), an interaction effect was tested with follow-up univariate analysis yielding significance only for harsh tactics. Structural equations modeling, used for comparing the fit generated for different mediators, indicated that acquiescence was the most salient mediator and provided adequate fit for the model predicting power tactics preference.

Research limitations/implications – Although it is difficult to exclude cultural effects when applying the Interpersonal Power Interaction Model (IPIM) in a specific country, it should be noted that, as far as factor structure is concerned, a similar pattern was obtained for Israeli and American participants in previous research (Raven *et al.*, 1998). Additionally, in the present study, the outcome measure was not observed but rather elicited through scenarios. The participant responses were derived from self-report questionnaires and are prone to percept–percept bias and common method variance.

Originality/value – For the first time, in a study where antecedent variables were manipulated, findings supported the revised IPIM. Power choice was demonstrated as a result of a sequential process with mediators serving as links between various organizational, situational and personal antecedents and outcomes.

Keywords Power, Conflict, Structural equations modeling

Paper type Research paper

The Interpersonal Power Interaction Model (IPIM; Raven, 1992) is a theoretical formulation describing the process by which power tactics are chosen in conflict situations for gaining compliance. The theory delineates socio-cultural, situational and personal factors that are involved in explaining the process of power tactics choice. Model predictions have been supported in various organizational contexts (e.g. Schwarzwald *et al.*, 2001; 2006). More recently, the IPIM was conceptualized as a sequential process comprising antecedents, mediators and outcome variables

The study is based on the dissertation of the first author.



(Koslowsky and Schwarzwald, 2009, 2001). Theoretically, the new model assumes a mediation process that has not yet been examined empirically. The purpose of the present study is to test a set of potential mediators derived from the leadership literature and examine their role for explaining the links between antecedents and outcomes in the model.

The conflict literature discusses various types of conflicts. For example, it identifies conflicts based on task versus personal issues as a difference of opinion embedded in the task itself, as opposed to interpersonal incompatibilities (Jehn, 1995). At times, conflicts have the potential for improving performance, (De Dreu, 2006; Dornon *et al.*, 2007) whereas in other circumstances, it hinders desired outcomes (Janssen *et al.*, 1999; Jehn and Mannix, 2001). Another distinction focuses on principle versus expediency conflicts. The former refers to the difference between disputes on basic, fundamental beliefs as opposed to disputes on the appropriateness of specific behaviors or procedures (Lankau *et al.*, 2007; Gelfand *et al.*, 1996).

The IPIM expands the original six-power bases (French and Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965) to 11 (Raven, 1992). Coercion and reward were separated into personal and impersonal perspectives, and legitimate power was differentiated into four tactics with each reflecting a specific social norm. The definitions for expertise, reference and informational tactics were not altered in the new taxonomy.

The new formulation focuses on task-related conflicts and the factors that affect the choice of power tactics. These factors were defined in general terms and operationalizing them into research variables is context contingent. Thus, for testing social-cultural factors, gender and religiosity were examined (Keshet *et al.*, 2006; Schwarzwald *et al.*, 2006), for a situational factor, work type was tested (Schwarzwald *et al.*, 2004) and for personal factors, status and self-esteem were analyzed (Raven, 1992; Schwarzwald and Koslowsky, 1999; Schwarzwald *et al.*, 2005). The inclusion of the personal factor in the model was based on the assumption that power tactics often serve as a means for satisfying personal needs.

For assessing usage of and compliance with the 11 power tactics, Raven *et al.* (1998) developed the Interpersonal Power Inventory (IPI). Although Yukl *et al.* (2008) also identified 11 tactics with somewhat different content, their scale presents items grouped by tactics, whereas in the IPI, items are presented randomly. Moreover, our approach has indicated that these 11 tactics reflect two stable power strategies: harsh and soft. These findings diverge from Yukl *et al.*'s results, where their recent analysis indicated that an 11 tactic model provided the best fit. The harsh strategy includes coercion, reward (personal and impersonal), legitimacy of position, equity and reciprocity, whereas the soft category consists of information, expertise, reference and legitimacy of dependence. A series of studies have supported this dichotomy in educational, organizational, law enforcement and romantic settings (e.g. Pierro *et al.*, 2008; Schwarzwald *et al.*, 2008; Schwarzwald *et al.*, 2006).

These power strategies are more than just a statistical finding, they also differ conceptually. Each strategy relies on different resources available to the influencing agent and represents a distinct approach toward the target person. The harsh strategy is mainly derived from one's position in the social or organizational hierarchy and emphasizes status advantages of the influencing agent over the target, as he or she can coerce, reward or demand compliance because of his or her standing in the hierarchy. The soft strategy approach is based on one's personal resources such as knowledge,

experience or charisma and reflects a more trusting and egalitarian perspective toward the target.

In the new conceptualization of the IPIM, power preference is viewed as the outcome of a set of antecedents and mediators (see Figure 1). In addition to the antecedents that were defined previously, the inclusion of mediators allows for a better understanding of power preference. In this mediating process, the influencing agent considers the cost/benefit implications associated with compliance/non-compliance by subordinates. For example, *Schwarzswald et al. (2005)* reported that participants choose harsh tactics to a greater extent when the target is from the out-group rather than from the in-group. The authors suggested that concerns with the in-group's status, especially in case of non-compliance, mediate the link between the choice of power tactics and the target group member (*Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986*).

Study purpose and hypotheses

In this study, we tested bank managers' tendencies to exercise power during conflicts with subordinates by applying the updated conceptualization of the IPIM.

Whereas *Jehn's (1995)* the conceptualization of conflict differentiates between task, relationship and process, the present study examines task as the main antecedent and views relationships as part of the manager's considerations in choosing power tactics for gaining compliance.

Four considerations (acquiescence, conformity, relations and workers' growth) were tested as potential mediators for explaining the association between antecedents (conflict severity, worker's ability, leadership style and organizational commitment) and outcome (power preference). Unlike previous studies that generally used self-report scales, here, two variables were manipulated.

The manipulated antecedents included conflict severity and workers' ability. Although the IPIM focuses on conflict situations, the impact of their content has been shown to play a role in power preference (*Schwarzswald et al., 2006*). In their investigation of teacher-student interactions, findings supported the notion that teachers resort more often to harsh tactics in conflict situations where behavioral norms are known rather than ambiguous. Other studies in organizational settings have shown the importance of conflict content as a predictor of power usage and compliance (*Yukl et al., 1996; 2005*). In a similar vein, studies on conflict management have shown that the

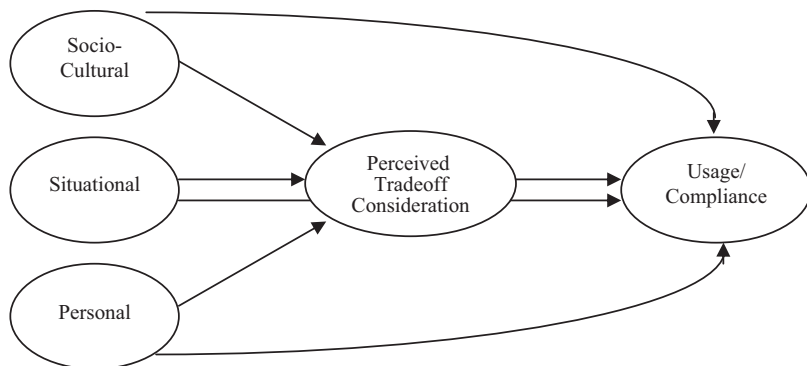


Figure 1.
The choice of power tactics in the IPIM

increase in conflict significance is associated with a greater likelihood to exercise harsh tactics (Fisher, 1990; Rubin *et al.*, 1994). Based on these findings, it was hypothesized:

H1. Conflict severity is positively associated with managers' tendency to resort to harsh tactics.

Ample research on workers' ability, our second manipulated antecedent, has indicated that it determines, to a large extent, the quality of the relationship between managers and workers (Murphy and Ensher, 1999; Schriesheim *et al.*, 2000; Townsend *et al.*, 2000). This distinction has been demonstrated for both work-related issues and interpersonal ones. Managers act more cooperatively toward workers with high ability and are more coercive toward their low ability employees (Gerstner and Day, 1997; Schriesheim *et al.*, 1998; Yukl and Fu, 1999). High-ability workers enjoy more freedom, whereas low-ability ones are more restricted and tend to be carefully scrutinized (Major *et al.*, 1995; Steiner, 1997). Thus, it was hypothesized:

H2. Workers' ability level is negatively related to managers' harsh tactics usage.

Leadership style was introduced into the model as a relevant personal characteristic. Previous research had already indicated that this antecedent is associated with compliance to power (Schwarzwald *et al.*, 2001). In a more recent study, Greer and Jehn (2009) reported that soft influence tactics were positively related to emergence of leadership in virtual organizations. Katz and Kahn (1978) argued that the relationship between leaders and subordinates ranges from coerced compliance to voluntary acceptance. These poles are consistent with the distinction between positional or harsh and personal or soft power tactics. In a similar vein, Avolio and Bass (1988) posited that compliance which stems from fear of punishment, promise of rewards and the desire to fulfill contractual obligations exemplifies subordination rather than voluntary acquiescence.

In describing transactional and transformational leaders, Bass (1985) adheres to the above distinction. Typically, transactional leaders emphasize the task and realize compliance through some form of control that emanates from positional power. As recently discussed by Clarke (2013, p. 24), the goal here is to identify "what actions subordinates must take to achieve outcomes and clarify these role and task requirements, so that subordinates are confident in exerting necessary efforts to fulfill leader expectations". Transformational leaders pay personal attention to follower needs, treat them with respect and employ a developmental orientation. The transformational style can be viewed as an augmentation to the transactional style (Bass, 1985). Moreover, Bass and his colleagues found that although each style has some positive consequences, transformational leadership was generally found to be more efficacious (Avolio and Bass, 1988; Avolio *et al.*, 1988, Bass, 1985; Hater and Bass, 1988; Kon *et al.*, 1995). This distinction led to the following hypothesis:

H3. Transformational leadership will be negatively related and transactional leadership positively related with harsh power usage.

Organizational commitment was a second personal characteristic that was considered relevant for the power model. Originally formulated by Mowday *et al.* (1982), this variable depicts an individual's involvement and identification with the organization. When committed, such workers believe in the values and attitudes that typify the

organization and are willing to exert effort for promoting its goals. Meyer and his associates (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1991) distinguished among three components of organizational commitment, namely, affective, normative and continuance. Of these, the affective or emotional component has repeatedly been shown to be a consistent predictor of various outcomes and behaviors in organizational settings (Blau *et al.*, 2008; Paglis and Green, 2002; Sturges *et al.*, 2002. More importantly, in managing conflicts, emotional commitment has been shown to be positively associated with an accepting and negatively related to a more coercive style (London and Howat, 1978). Accordingly, we hypothesized:

H4. Emotional commitment is positively related to soft tactics usage and negatively to harsh tactic usage.

As the model here assumes a sequential process involving the cost and benefits associated with target's non-compliance, four such potential considerations, reflecting different managerial approaches for achieving organizational goals, were tested as mediators: acquiescence, relations, worker growth and conformity. Acquiescence was included as some managers prefer that workers accede readily to their requests and adjust power usage accordingly (Koslowsky *et al.*, 2011). Relations with workers are viewed by some managers as paramount in effective leadership (Yukl, 1998). Worker growth was tested as supervisors place different emphasis on this consideration and, consequently, conflicts with workers would be differentially managed regarding appropriate power usage (Fenwick, 2003). Conformity, which focuses on the importance placed by managers for workers adhering to organizational norms, can also affect power tactics choice (Raven, 1992). All four mediators suggested above have as yet not been tested in the process linking antecedents to power choice. The following general hypothesis was tested:

H5. Acquiescence, relations, worker growth and conformity are each expected to mediate the link between antecedents and power preference.

Before analyzing each hypothesis individually, an overall test for mediation using hierarchical regression will be conducted. All antecedents will be entered in the first stage, followed by mediators in the second stage. If examination of regression coefficients indicates the existence of an overall mediation effect, each hypothesis mentioned above will then be tested. These results will determine the final structure of the antecedents–mediator–outcome sequence, as formulated in the updated IPIM model.

Method

Participants

The study population included branch managers from two large banks in Israel, the first, with 133 branches, and the second, 87. In a preliminary survey, human resource (HR) managers were asked to select managers who had been in their position for over six months and in their annual evaluations by supervisors were found to have at least one worker at each performance ability level: high, average and low. In cases where there was more than one worker in a category, random number selection was used for identifying whose name would be included in the questionnaire. This yielded a sample of 178 managers. All managers that met these criteria were contacted and 120 (a

response rate of 67 per cent) agreed to participate (78 from the larger bank and the rest from the smaller one).

Each manager was presented with one subordinate who was randomly chosen – high, average or low performer – from the list supplied by the bank’s human resource department. As the analysis by biographical data (gender, age, education, seniority in the bank and seniority as a manager) showed no significant differences between banks, the two samples were combined. Sample characteristics included: 76 per cent males, mean age of approximately 49. Among the participants, somewhat less than 70 per cent reported finishing university. In addition, the mean tenure for managers was 16.1 years in the bank and 4.8 years as the manager.

Measures

The first four scales were completed by the managers and the fifth scale by a sample of workers who worked under each manager’s supervision.

Manager interpersonal power scale. Adapted from the original Raven *et al.* (1998) inventory, the scale begins with a description of a conflict situation between a manager and his/her subordinate. It is followed by a set of items delineating possible power tactics that the manager can employ for gaining compliance (e.g. “After all, I am your supervisor”; “You will receive special benefits if you comply”). Two versions of the questionnaire differing by conflict severity (high, low) were constructed. For high conflict severity, the following script appeared:

Bank management has distributed a document notifying managers that a new experimental computer program has been developed that produces computerized reports rather than the manual ones presently used throughout the bank. Managers are required to test the new program within a week and comment on it. Consequently, you instructed one of the workers (as identified by the researcher and whose name is printed on a label) to examine the new program. Due to the heavy workload in the bank, you have asked this worker to stay around after hours and perform the test after the regular work day. The worker because of his/her own reasons does not want to comply.

In the low conflict severity scenario, the following script appeared:

During a conversation with the bank regional manager, you became aware of the fact that a new experimental computer program has been developed that produces computerized reports rather than the manual ones presently used throughout the bank. Provided you can fit it into your schedule, the regional manager has suggested that you may want to examine this new program during the coming week and comment on it. Consequently, you requested from one of the workers (as identified by the researcher and whose name is printed on a label) to test the new program. Due to the heavy workload in the bank, you have asked him/her to test the program after the regular work day. The worker because of his/her own reasons does not want to comply.

The managers were told that the name on the questionnaire was randomly selected from a list of his/her subordinates to make the conflict appear more realistic. They were asked to remove the label after completing the questionnaire so as to ensure confidentiality.

The reliabilities of the power tactic components were calculated. Considering the fact that each tactic consists of only three items, the internal consistency values (see Table I) were quite satisfactory, ranging from 0.69 to 0.81. In addition, Table I presents the findings from a principal component analysis conducted on the 11 tactics. A two-strategy solution was obtained:

Table I.
Principal component
analysis of power
tactics and
reliabilities

Factor and power tactics	Loadings		Coefficient alpha
	Factor I	Factor II	
<i>Harsh tactics</i>			
Impersonal coercion	0.88	-0.14	0.81
Legitimacy of position	0.85	0.18	0.79
Personal coercion	0.81	0.03	0.79
Legitimacy of equity	0.81	-0.01	0.74
Impersonal reward	0.81	-0.17	0.77
Legitimacy of reciprocity	0.78	0.01	0.69
Personal reward	0.77	-0.29	0.77
<i>Soft tactics</i>			
Legitimacy of dependence	-0.26	0.80	0.74
Reference	-0.33	0.76	0.73
Expertise	0.24	0.70	0.69
Information	0.06	0.65	0.70
Eigenvalue	4.91	2.22	
% of explained variance	45	20	

- (1) harsh strategy including personal and impersonal coercion and reward, legitimacy of position, equity and reciprocity tactics; and
- (2) soft strategy including legitimacy of dependence, reference, expertise and information tactics.

This dichotomy concurs with previous research in the field (see, [Schwarzwald and Koslowsky, 2006](#)). As such, two scores were determined for these strategies.

Since two versions of the conflicts were constructed, a manipulation check was performed where managers responded to five questions relating to conflict severity with item responses ranging from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much). Means of responses by level of conflict severity are presented in [Table II](#). As multiple *t*-tests (five) were calculated for comparing the two scripts, the Bonferroni correction was applied, so that the acceptable critical region was set to 0.01. Although the mean values for both scripts indicate similar

Table II.
Means and (SD's) for
manipulation check
questions by conflict
severity

Question content	Significance of request		<i>T</i>
	Low	High	
To what extent is the event realistic?	4.25 (1.36)	3.83 (1.03)	0.85
To what extent is the request essential for the effectiveness of your work?	3.25 (1.29)	4.25 (0.45)	-2.54
To what extent is it important for the bank that the worker complies?	3.58 (1.08)	4.67 (0.49)	-3.15**
To what extent is it essential for proper bank performance that the worker complies?	3.17 (0.72)	4.17 (0.58)	-3.76**
To what extent is it important for you that the worker complies?	4.50 (0.90)	4.75 (0.48)	-0.86

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

perceptions as regards reality, the high severity script, as expected, was perceived as being more important for the bank and for the manager.

Four mediating considerations. This questionnaire was developed to examine four considerations as potential mediators between antecedents and power strategy preference: *acquiescence* – manager’s desire to maintain status or authority by requiring workers to act according to his/her requests; *growth* – manager’s desire to professionally enhance workers’ abilities and skills; *relations* – manager’s desire to maintain good relations with the worker; and *conformity* – manager’s desire that workers adhere to organizational norms.

Each of the conflicts described earlier was followed by 16 statements assessing these considerations. Examples include the following:

- to make sure that the request would be followed (acquiescence);
- to enhance worker performance ability (growth);
- to express respect for the worker (relations); and
- to act according to bank guidelines (conformity).

Responses used the nomination format (Coie *et al.*, 1982; Newcomb and Bukowski, 1983), in which participants mark a “+” next to the four most important statements (coded as 3) and a “-” next to the four least important ones (coded as 1). All other alternatives i.e. those not marked were assigned a value of 2. An average score for each of the four considerations was calculated such that a higher score indicated greater importance. The mean scores in ascending order of consideration importance were: acquiescence ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.55$), growth ($M = 1.81$, $SD = 0.44$), relations ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.54$) and conformity ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.60$).

As the present questionnaire was constructed for this study, a validity check was conducted in which 18 judges (ten I/O psychologists working in banks, eight I/O university psychologists) classified the items into four categories according to the definitions provided to them. All items in the final scale received inter-judgmental agreement greater than 70 per cent. In addition, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) performed on manager responses yielded adequate goodness of fit indices ($NFI = 0.83$, $CFI = 0.92$, root mean square error of approximation ($RMSEA$) = 0.08).

Emotional commitment. A Hebrew translation (Weiszner, 2002) of the emotional component of the Meyer *et al.* (1993) commitment scale was used here. The use of this component is popular in the literature (see, for example, Herold *et al.*, 2008). The measure consists of six affective evaluations of the organization with responses ranging from “strongly disagree” 1 to “strongly agree” 7. Internal consistency reliability was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.84$).

Multi-factor leadership questionnaire – form 5× (MFLQ). A Hebrew translation (Kark *et al.*, 2003) of the shortened version of the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MFLQ) (Avolio *et al.*, 1999) was used. Bass (1997) has already argued that the scale is applicable across various countries and cultures including Israel and has been used by other researchers in Israel, most recently by Kark *et al.* (2012). The scale differentiates between transformational and transactional leaders. It includes 36 items describing manager behavior. It was completed by three workers randomly selected for each manager who indicated how often their manager manifests each behavior on a scale from “never” 1 to “almost always” 5. As commonly accepted, two global scores,

transformational and transactional, were calculated (Yammarino and Bass, 1990; Waldman *et al.*, 1990). Internal consistency for these scores was satisfactory (0.94 and 0.77, respectively).

Biographical items. Questions regarding gender, age, education, seniority in the organization and tenure as manager were included.

Procedure

After manager selection, a booklet containing the scales and a self-addressed envelope was distributed by the HR department. The booklet contained an introductory letter describing the study purpose as “trying to understand the behavior of managers involved in conflicts with their workers”. The letter assured confidentiality and informed the manager that some scales include a sticker referring to one of their own workers selected randomly to enhance the reality of the situation. Managers were asked to remove the stickers after questionnaire completion.

Results

Previous research has repeatedly shown that tactics subsumed under the soft strategy category are preferred to those included within the harsh strategy category (see, Schwarzwald and Koslowsky, 2006). To verify whether the same pattern exists here, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with strategy (harsh, soft) as the within-subject measure and organization (Bank A, B) as the between-subject variable was conducted. Findings showed significance only for strategy, *Wilks' Lambda* = 0.56, $F(1, 118) = 91.74, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.44$. Similar to previous findings, the data indicated greater preference for the soft ($M = 4.54$) rather than the harsh ($M = 3.09$) strategy. Moreover, the mean for each soft tactic was higher than any of the harsh tactic means (see Table III). As a perusal of the Table revealed that the two bank means do not differ by any tactic, all further analyses combined the data from both.

Testing for moderation

For the two manipulated variables, conflict (high significance, low significance) and worker performance (high, average, low), an interaction effect was tested. Accordingly, a MANOVA was performed where conflict significance and worker performance were considered as between subject variables and strategy (harsh/soft) as the dependent variable. Significant findings were observed for conflict, *Wilks' Lambda* = 0.85; $F(2, 113) = 10.2374; p < 0.001; \eta^2 = 0.15$, performance level, *Wilks' Lambda* = 0.76; $F(4, 226) = 8.49; p < 0.001; \eta^2 = 0.13$ and their interaction, *Wilks' Lambda* = 0.92; $F(4, 226) = 2.37; p = 0.053; \eta^2 = 0.04$.

The follow-up univariate analysis yielded significance only for harsh tactics. Post-hoc comparisons (Scheffe) indicated that the harsh tactic mean for low performer ($M = 3.82$) was significantly ($p < .01$) greater than for the average ($M = 2.79$) or for the high performer ($M = 2.69$). As the latter two means were found not to differ from each other, further analyses combined the groups.

Testing for mediation

The presence of mediation is determined by examining four relationships:

- (1) The antecedent or IV is significantly associated with the DV or outcome.
- (2) The IV is significantly associated with the mediator.

Strategy Tactic	Organization		Total	Power preference of bank managers	
	Bank A	Bank B			
<i>Soft</i>					
Information	5.57 (1.17)	5.40 (1.02)	5.51 (1.12)	135	
Expertise	4.21 (1.39)	4.51 (1.20)	4.32 (1.33)		
Reference	4.24 (1.31)	4.29 (1.20)	4.25 (1.26)		
Legitimacy of dependence	3.94 (1.30)	4.26 (1.15)	4.05 (1.25)		
Legitimacy of position	3.56 (1.58)	3.77 (1.35)	3.63 (1.50)		
Overall Mean	4.49 (0.95)	4.62 (0.84)	4.54 (0.91)		
<i>Harsh</i>					
Personal reward	3.38 (1.47)	3.10 (1.29)	3.28 (1.41)		
Legitimacy of reciprocity	3.13 (1.47)	3.36 (1.45)	3.21 (1.46)		
Legitimacy of equity	3.04 (1.57)	3.52 (1.33)	3.21 (1.50)		
Personal coercion	2.87 (1.44)	2.70 (1.24)	2.81 (1.37)		
Impersonal reward	2.78 (1.52)	2.83 (1.14)	2.79 (1.48)		
Impersonal coercion	2.68 (1.63)	2.72 (1.46)	2.69 (1.56)		
Overall Mean	3.06 (1.25)	3.15 (1.11)	3.09 (1.20)		

Note: Higher means indicate greater strategy/tactic preference

Table III.
Means (SD's) for power tactics by strategy and organization

- (3) The mediator is significant associated with the outcome.
- (4) The relationship between the IV and the outcome is significantly reduced after including the mediator in the model.

Initially, an overall test for mediation using hierarchical regression was conducted. In this analysis, all antecedents (conflict significance, worker ability, leadership style and emotional commitment) were entered concurrently in the first stage. In the second stage, the mediators (acquiescence, conformity, relations and worker growth) were entered. For harsh tactics as the outcome measure, all antecedents, except for transactional style, were significant. In the second stage, total R^2 was seen as increasing from 0.56 to 0.74 ($\Delta F = 6.4, p < 0.001$) and the inclusion of mediators significantly reduced the antecedent beta coefficients. A similar analysis for soft tactics showed that only the beta coefficients for leadership style and emotional commitment were significant. The inclusion of mediators significantly increased R^2 from 0.13 to 0.30 ($\Delta F = 6.9, p < 0.001$), however, none of the antecedents showed a decrease in beta coefficients.

Follow-up tests examined the significance and source of beta reduction as delineated in the study hypotheses.

Antecedents and outcomes. Separate regression analyses for the harsh and soft strategies were then performed. Table IV presents the beta coefficients for the outcome variables on the antecedents. All of these associations concurred with our hypotheses. Greater conflict significance, lower worker ability, less transformational leadership, less emotional commitment were all associated with greater tendency to exercise the harsh strategy. Interestingly, when each of the transformational style components (idealized attributes, idealized behavior, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration) was correlated with harsh tactics, none were significant, yet all of them

were in the expected direction. As for the soft strategy, higher transformational and emotional commitment was positively related with greater soft strategy preference.

As proof for mediation requires all four conditions to be met, transactional style which was not associated with either of the outcomes was not analyzed further.

Antecedents and mediators. The associations between antecedents and mediators were then examined. Table V indicates that among the four mediators, acquiescence was associated with all antecedents; conformity with all antecedents except worker ability; relations with two of the antecedents, worker ability and emotional commitment; worker growth with just transformational style. All other non-significant associations were not analyzed further.

Mediators and outcomes. The four considerations postulated as mediators were examined by applying separate regressions to the soft and harsh outcome strategies (Table VI). The analysis for the harsh strategy yielded significant negative coefficients for relations and conformity and a positive coefficient for acquiescence. Except for worker's growth where findings were not significant, these relationships concur with expectations. For the soft strategy outcome, a positive coefficient was obtained for

Table IV.
Regression analyses
of outcomes on
antecedents

Antecedents	Harsh		Soft	
	β	t	β	t
Conflict severity	0.31	3.51**	0.12	1.31
Worker ability	-0.42	-5.08**	0.10	1.11
Transactional style	0.01	0.11	-0.11	-1.2
Transformational style	-0.26	-2.96**	0.22	2.48*
Emotional commitment	-0.48	-6.01**	0.22	2.45*

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table V.
Regression analyses
of mediators on
antecedents

Antecedents	Acquiescence		Growth		Relation		Conformity	
	β	T	β	T	β	T	β	T
Conflict severity	0.33	3.80**	-0.06	<i>ns</i>	0.01	<i>ns</i>	-0.31	-3.57
Worker ability	-0.38	-4.39**	-0.05	<i>ns</i>	0.44	5.36**	-0.06	<i>Ns</i>
Transformational style	-0.33	-3.84**	0.36	4.17**	-0.10	<i>ns</i>	0.19	2.11*
Emotional commitment	-0.28	-3.19**	-0.16	<i>ns</i>	0.24	2.69*	0.26	2.96*

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table VI.
Regression analyses
of outcomes on
mediators

Considerations	Harsh		Soft	
	β	t	β	t
Acquiescence	0.64	9.10**	-0.03	<i>ns</i>
Worker growth	0.01	<i>ns</i>	0.08	<i>ns</i>
Relations	-0.30	3.46**	0.36	4.19**
Conformity	-0.45	5.46**	-0.12	<i>ns</i>

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

relations as a mediator and was in line with our hypothesis. Again, non-significant associations were not considered further.

Mediation effects. In this section, only antecedent–mediator–outcome relationships that met all mediation criteria analyzed above were further considered. As such, after examining the data, worker growth and relations were dropped from any further analysis.

Conflict severity and harsh outcome. The inclusion of acquiescence in the regression reduced the beta for conflict severity from 0.31 to a non-significant value supporting its role as a mediator. A similar analysis using another mediator in the regression, conformity, showed a reduction in the beta for conflict severity from 0.31 ($p < 0.01$) to 0.19 ($p < 0.05$). As the reduced beta was still significant, a Sobel test was conducted and yielded a significant value ($z = 2.88, p < 0.01$), indicating partial mediation.

Worker ability and harsh outcome. The inclusion of acquiescence in the regression reduced the beta for worker ability from -0.44 ($p < 0.01$) to -0.21 ($p < 0.01$). The Sobel test indicated partial mediation was present here as well ($z = -3.81, p < 0.01$).

Transformational style and harsh outcome. The inclusion of acquiescence in the regression reduced the beta for transformational style from -0.26 ($p < 0.01$) to a non-significant value, indicating complete mediation in this case.

Affective commitment and harsh outcome. For this antecedent, two mediators met the criteria delineated above. First, the inclusion of acquiescence in the regression reduced the beta for emotional commitment from -0.48 ($p < 0.01$) to -0.33 ($p < 0.01$). The Sobel test ($z = 3.39, p < 0.01$) indicated a partial mediation. Second, the inclusion of conformity as a mediator reduced the beta for emotional commitment from -0.48 ($p < 0.01$) to -0.39 ($p < 0.01$); again, partial mediation was obtained ($z = -2.35, p < 0.05$).

Overall model

Finally, we compared three alternative models that differed by mediator. These models were derived from the analyses of mediating effects described above and were tested with structural equations modeling. In the first model, acquiescence is included as a latent mediator construct, reflecting feelings of potential loss of status if subordinate does not comply. In the second model, conformity is included as the latent mediator construct, reflecting manager's desire to adhere to organizational behavioral norms if the subordinate does not comply. In the third case, the two mediators were combined.

Goodness of fit values and the explained variance of each model are presented in Table VII. The findings indicated that, overall, the acquiescence model (see Figure 2) is the best of the three and provided adequate fit values ($CFI = 0.93$ and $RMSEA = 0.07$).

Discussion

Using the updated IPIM model which describes the choice of power tactics as an outcome of antecedents and mediators, our study tested for the first time the complete

Model	χ^2	df^*	p	χ^2/df	CFI	$RMSEA$	R^2
Acquiescence	110.02	74	0.001	1.50	0.93	0.07	0.69
Conformity	147.00	75	0.001	1.96	0.87	0.09	0.59
Combined	220.50	128	0.001	1.72	0.87	0.08	0.69

Note: * As the models vary by mediator, the df 's reflect the different latent constructs

Table VII.
Goodness of fit values for the three alternative models

mediation process. More specifically, the model assumes that the relationship between antecedents and power preference is mediated by the influencing agent's considerations of the cost associated with target non-compliance. Four such considerations were tested as potential mediators – acquiescence, relations, worker growth and conformity. The basis for including these mediators in the analysis was to determine if they can contribute toward an explanation of the process leading to power choice. The data showed that acquiescence mediated the relationship between all antecedents in the model and power choice. Conformity was a significant mediator for explaining only the links between two antecedents – conflict severity and affective commitment – and power choice. When comparing these mediators, acquiescence appears to be superior and when both were simultaneously analyzed, conformity did not improve fit. Thus, findings provided empirical validation for the revised IPIM.

Although the literature identifies good relations and worker growth as salient managerial goals (Fenwick, 2003; Yukl, 1997), neither was found to be a significant mediator here. It would appear that in manager-subordinate conflicts, acquiescence and organization norms become more salient, whereas worker growth and relations less so. Unlike other types of interactions with subordinates where good relations and worker growth are major considerations, in conflict situations where power choice is involved, managers appear to be more concerned with the potential effect of non-compliance on their status and/or the need to adhere to organizational norms. In other words, these four mediators are situational contingent such that the hierarchy of considerations differs for conflict and non-conflict interactions. As acquiescence explained more of the links than any other mediator, our discussion below will focus on this finding.

Acquiescence fully accounted for the conflict severity and transformational leadership style links with the outcome variable and partially mediated the worker ability and affective commitment links with outcome. Regarding conflict severity, managers who feel responsible for attaining specific organizational goals, believe that subordinate non-compliance hinders goal attainment. The importance of the conflict

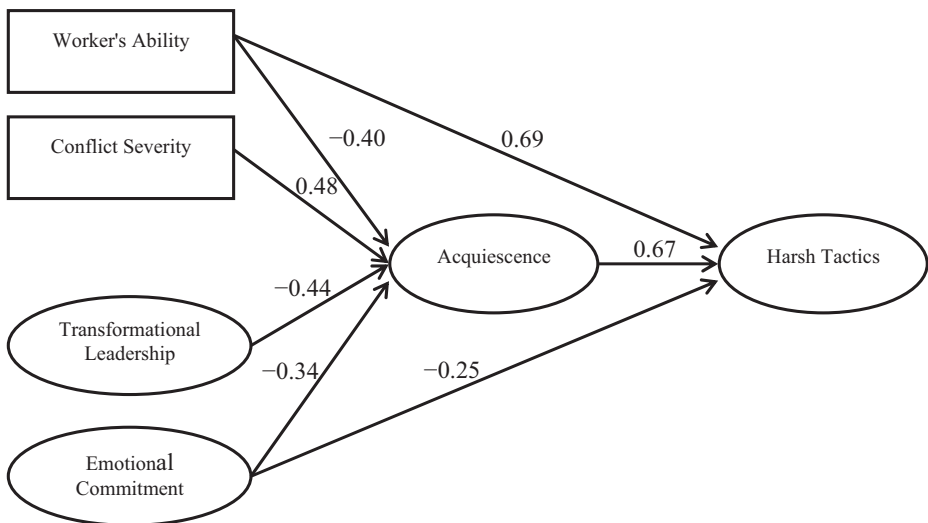


Figure 2.
The acquiescence
mediation model

content for managers in determining power choice has also been shown by Yukl *et al.* (1996) who found that power tactic preference and compliance are related to the meaning of the conflict for the organization. Stated differently, an increase in content significance of the conflicts elevates managers' tendency to become more demanding.

The association between transformational style and harsh tactic preference reflects manager tendency of high transformational supervisors to employ less harsh tactics as compared to their low transformational counterparts. This association was expected as leaders high on this trait often demonstrate charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation and personal attention (Avolio *et al.*; Bass, 1990; Dvir *et al.*, 2002). As acquiescence is incongruent with high transformational leadership, these leaders will tend to avoid harsh tactics. In contrast, low transformational leaders who require obedience would be more likely to apply these tactics.

As for the worker ability-harsh outcome link, acquiescence is particularly salient in conflicts with low-ability workers. Managers may feel that such subordinates lack the ability to make independent decisions or, even, offer sound suggestions. Moreover, non-compliance may be seen as leading to negative consequences for manager status, or possibly, harming organizational work procedures. Indeed, ample research supports the notion that worker ability is an important factor in determining how managers relate to subordinates (Schriesheim *et al.*, 2000; Townsend *et al.*, 2000). Managers evince more cooperative behavior toward talented workers and are more controlling toward those less talented (e.g. Gerstner and Day, 1997; Yukl and Fu, 1999). Higher-ability workers also enjoy several benefits including a warmer reception/approach, informal communication and positive rewards (Bhal and Ansari, 1996) and are more often exposed to softer influencing methods (Podsakoff and Schriesheim, 1985).

One can understand the dynamic underlying the affective commitment-harsh outcome link by considering the fact that high emotional attachment to the organization implies a greater willingness to exert energy and time needed for persuading subordinates. The IPIM assumes that soft tactics, rather than harsh ones, are more appropriate for accomplishing this goal. Indeed, London and Howat (1978) who examined the association between emotional commitment and strategies employed for managing conflicts reported a positive relationship between emotional commitment and confrontation and a negative one with coercion. More recently, Luchak (2003) found that in conflict situations high emotional commitment managers prefer to solve conflicts with senior executives using direct communication which implies an investment of time and effort enabling the parties to reach agreement. These managers also seek to maintain rapport with their workers in a positive working atmosphere. Harsh tactics would likely not be conducive for attaining these goals.

It is also worthwhile to point out several methodological advantages of the study as well as the robustness of the findings. Though our hypotheses were tested in the field, two variables, the significance of the conflict for the organization and subordinate ability, were manipulated. Moreover, several of the conclusions derived from the findings concur with those reported in other studies using the IPIM perspective. Specifically, robustness of the findings was demonstrated by the replication of previous observations concerning the harsh/soft dichotomy of power tactics, the preference for soft over harsh, and the greater predictability afforded by harsh tactics (Koslowsky and Schwarzwald, 2009, 2001). Similar to earlier findings, our study indicated that organizational and personal factors are more prominently involved with harsh, rather

than, soft tactics. Harsh tactics are more informative than the soft ones, as the latter are more socially acceptable and, when surveyed, more readily declared making it difficult to determine whether the reported behavior is truthful or simply reflects biases (e.g. social desirability, impression management). As reporting harsh tactics usage is less socially desirable, it may indeed be more truthful and revealing.

It is worthwhile to end this discussion by pointing out several limitations. Although it is difficult to exclude any cultural effects when applying the IPIM to a specific group or country, it should be noted that upon constructing the IPI, a similar factor structure was obtained for Israeli and American participants (Raven *et al.*, 1998).

Although field studies such as the one reported here are usually accompanied with high external validity, one cannot ignore the fact that power usage was not directly observed but rather elicited through scenarios. As such, the data concerning power tactics were derived from self-report questionnaires which are prone to percept–percept bias and common method variance (Crampton and Wagner, 1994). To reduce the spurious effects of common method variance, future researchers may consider developing a more direct, observational approach where power usage would be obtained in real-life situations. In addition, the application of vignettes, though widely used in social research, may create a disjuncture between the vignette content and the actual experiences of research respondents (Wilson and While, 1998). Finally, one cannot ignore the fact that the study here was conducted with bank managers which may limit its generalizability and not be readily applicable to other settings where conflicts between authority figures and subordinates may arise.

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Corresponding author

Meni Koslowsky can be contacted at: koslowme@yahoo.com

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