

Power and Bargaining in Authority-Client Relations

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Abstract

This article presents a theory of tactical action designed to analyze the authority-client relationship, i.e., voluntary, noncontractual relation between service-providers and their clients. The focus is on conflicts that arise when authorities refuse requests from clients, and the theory predicts the tactical choices of the clients. Authority-client relationships are seen from an exchange perspective. The theory is structured around power-dependence and integrates legitimacy and attribution notions with previous theories of tactical action. The major predictions indicate that the client's choice of tactic is a function of an interaction between (1) the client's attribution of the authority's reason for refusal and (2) the respective power positions of the client and the authority.

INTRODUCTION

Many aspects of social life are organized around power asymmetries. These asymmetries provide some individuals with more influence than others. The individuals with more power and influence, superordinates, gain their positions in various ways—by possessing unique and valued knowledge and skills, by possessing or controlling greater amounts of physical force, by appointment to institutional roles, or by election. The manner of achieving the power, along with the mere magnitude of it, underlies much of the compliance low-power individuals accord to their higher-power counterparts. However, the compliance is far from certain. Lower-power actors often search for ways to influence higher-power actors despite their relative power position, and sometimes they succeed. This study will analyze the tactics used by subordinates to influence superordinates. It will develop a classification scheme for grouping tactics and propositions linking the choice of tactic to the power relationship.

Approaches to understanding the relationship between superordinate and subordinate actors have been restricted in several ways. First, consideration has been limited often to formally contractual relations such as those between employer and employee or supervisor and worker. Second, most studies of asymmetric relations focus on the more powerful actor's behavior and how it influences the less powerful actors. Finally, approaches to superordinate-subordinate relations either stress the structural context to the exclusion of the social interaction that responds to and sustains the social structure or stress the social interaction to the exclusion of the social structure (Parsons 1937; Weber 1947; Turner 1962; Dornbusch and Scott 1975; Strauss 1977; Weick 1979). This article is an effort to integrate the structural and interactional

features of superordinate-subordinate relations of a particular form or type: authority-client. It adopts a social-exchange approach to the structure and a tactical approach to the interaction.

More specifically, this article offers a theoretical analysis of attempts by subordinates who are clients to influence authorities who are “service providers.” The context of concern is as follows. The client seeks a service from an authority who, in turn, is obligated to provide the service and is vested with the legitimized power to make demands on the client. While the client does not have authority (i.e., legitimized power), he or she does have legitimate rights to request and expect certain responses from the authority. Mutual, normatively based expectations pervade the relationship. This discussion assumes a conflict between authority and client about these normative expectations and examines the response of clients to the conflict.

The study of asymmetric relations is extended in two ways. First, while there is an extensive literature on influence tactics, the focus is either on attempts by equals to influence equals or attempts by superordinates to influence subordinates (Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma 1973; Kipnis 1976; Molm 1985). Somewhat less research has been conducted on influence attempts of subordinates on authorities, the general issue of primary concern to this study. Second, the research that has been conducted on attempts by subordinates to influence superordinates almost universally assumes a work or job setting with an explicit contractual relationship between authority and subordinate. The authority is typically a group leader entrusted with the task of moving the group toward its objectives, and the subordinate is a worker who contributes to the collective task and receives some benefit (i.e., pay) in return for this contribution (Michener and Burt 1974; Lawler 1975; Hollander 1980; Bacharach and Lawler 1981b). However, the authority-client relations of concern here create mutual obligations that

essentially substitute for the explicit contractual elements common to many other superordinate-subordinate relationships.

Postindustrial society is becoming oriented increasingly to the production and consumption of services, as political sociologists as well as others have noted (Braungart 1981). From the wide range of services, we focus on those based in socially legitimized institutions. The service providers possess legitimized authority by virtue of their positions in the institution, which need not be high, their specialized knowledge and skills, the process of election or appointment to the position, or some combination of these. The consumer clients, on the other hand, seek services from the authorities in the institution because of a lack of direct access or lack of knowledge and are thereby dependent on the authority for the required access, information, or assistance. Authority-client relations that reveal features of relevance to this study include government official-citizen, political representative-constituent, health care provider-patient, and professor-college student.

Authority-client relations involve a common goal and substantial voluntarism. The common goal of authorities and clients is to produce some change in the condition or behavior of the client. The client voluntarily comes forth to seek this change, and the authority has an obligation to provide the service upon request of a client. What is particularly interesting about this form of superordinate-subordinate relationship is that the client can refuse a relationship with the authority, while the authority is obligated to accept the service relationship. Such relations are conceptualized herein as legitimized, asymmetrical power relationships that are initiated and sustained by the low-power actor's (i.e., client) desire for certain services.

The existence of a common goal is not sufficient to produce smooth, harmonious interaction between authority and client. Conflict often occurs because there is substantial

variability in how the goal might be achieved and, specifically, how the general rights and obligations are translated into social action. This variability creates substantial ambiguity and the need for negotiation or bargaining. Once a relationship is established, either the authority or the client may question whether the other is working effectively toward the common goal or other goals that may become important following the establishment of the relationship (e.g., keeping the cost of the relationship low for both actors). For example, the authority may perceive the client as acting in ways that obstruct achievement of the goal (which reflects badly on the ability of the authority to effectively utilize his or her expertise), and the client may perceive the authority as not doing enough to create the change desired by the client or as imposing too large a cost. Once a conflict is perceived, each actor considers whether to attempt to influence the other and how. The resulting interchange is a form of bargaining, and the influence attempts can be construed as tactics.

In this article a theory of tactical action is proposed that is designed to answer two primary questions: (1) Under what conditions will clients, facing a conflict with an authority, attempt influence rather than simply comply or withdraw from the relationship? (2) What conditions determine the choice of tactics by the client? The theory will focus solely on the client, specifically, the reactions of a client to the refusal of a request; it adopts a social-exchange approach and treats the power relationship as the structural foundation of tactical action; and, finally, it suggests that the interpretation of the authority's reasons for a refusal of the request will modify the impact of the power relationship on the tactical action of the client. The basic thrust of the theory is that the decisions of the client will be based on an interaction of the power relationship and attribution processes.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There are four bodies of literature central to the topic of this article: social exchange, legitimacy, tactical choice, and attribution. Social exchange theory offers the general starting point, and power-dependence much of the theoretical content (Emerson 1972; Cook, Emerson, Gillmore, and Yamagishi 1983; Lawler and Bachrach 1986). However, concepts of authority and legitimacy are important to understand the organizational context and normative foundation of authority-client relations (Zelditch 1972; Dornbusch and Scott 1975; Smith 1984), and the research literature on “tactic choice” will be helpful in conceptualizing the options of the client (Michener and Suchner 1972). Attribution theory incorporates the client’s perception of the authority’s reasons for refusing a request. After an elaboration of the social-exchange approach to authority-client relations, we will briefly discuss what is drawn from the other literatures.

Social Exchange

Social exchange explanations of authority structures begin with unequal exchange relationships that are based on and, in turn, strengthen asymmetrical dependence/power. These unequal power relations must be legitimized before authority, as such, exists. According to Blau (1964), power arises during an exchange process between individuals (or groups) when one member cannot reciprocate in kind for a needed good or service and therefore returns gratitude, respect, status, or compliance. When member (B) is dependent on member (A) for goods or services, but, A does not depend on B for a good, B must give A power over self (compliance with A’s directives) instead. If this exchange of goods or services for power is collectively

approved—i.e., *legitimated*—it becomes authority. Blau proceeds to argue that exchange, as such, no longer occurs directly between A and B, because direct exchange implies equality. Indirect exchange replaces the *direct* exchange between A and B. The indirect exchange process entails individual (B) compliance in accordance with the collectivity's (Bs) norms, and the collectivity exchange of group compliance for the authority's (A) contribution of goods/services for the common welfare.

Legitimation

Legitimizing processes—collective approval of the exchange of status and compliance for service—develop from two sources. The first is the norms or rules of an organized group; the second is the informal acceptance of the exchange by group members (Michener and Burt 1974). Dornbusch and Scott (1975) specify these two facets of legitimacy further. The first, which they call *authorization*, arises when groups superior to the power wielder recognize or approve the rules that justify the power distribution. Second, when groups or group members who are peers of the power recipient recognize or accept the rules, the process is termed *endorsement*. The rules may be recognized and/or approved. That is, the legitimizing norms or rules can be only recognized, i.e., regarded as binding guides for behavior, or they may be approved, i.e., accepted as proper and just. Either condition is sufficient for legitimation, but the combination of both will produce higher degrees of legitimacy than otherwise. In sum, subordinate compliance is increased when authorization *and* group endorsement are present. While recognition is sufficient for public compliance, acceptance in conjunction with approval will significantly heighten the overall level of compliance and private compliance in particular.

Zelditch and Walker (1984), building on and expanding the Dornbusch-Scott theory, assert that authority systems are cooperative ones, requiring both endorsement by a collectivity and authorization by centers of power in a society. These authority systems are stable and compliance unquestioned if the requests for behavior are seen as compatible, proper or fair, and also if the system is seen as “valid.” The degree of compatibility is a judgment by the individual regarding a request for compliance. Is the request proper and fair? Although the authors do not label this as the collectivity constraining the individual’s behavior, the judgment is said to rest on the collectivity’s norms of fairness, a source similar to Blau’s behavioral constraints and related to Dornbusch and Scott’s approval and acceptance by group members. Validity is the assumption by actors that the “structure will work in a certain way and that this will be supported by the conduct of other agents of authority” (Zelditch and Walker 1984, p. 5). Validity enhances stability and compliance by directly providing a felt obligation to obey the valid authority and indirectly by affecting the judgments of propriety.

The social structure that provides the context for the authority-client relations constrains the behavior of both the authority, who must act within the normative rules of the structure, and the client, who is subjected to pressure toward compliance from peers and from other authorities. Within these constraints, however, each dyad pair interacts to achieve a beneficial outcome from the exchange. The interdependence within the dyad gives rise to interpersonal power processes which affect these outcomes.

Interpersonal Power

Emerson's (1962, 1972) theory of power-dependence states that the power of actor A over B is determined by actor B's dependence on Actor A for achievement of B's goal. Power is defined as potential influence, or the amount of resistance on the part of B that A can overcome. Specifically, for the current discussion, the power of the authority over the client is a function of the dependence of the client on the authority for achievement of goals. Emerson defines dependence as a function of two elements—the motivational investment in or the value of the outcomes or goal mediated by the other (here, goal value), and the availability of alternative sources of the goal.

Since each actor's power is determined separately by the dependence of the other, each actor's power can theoretically change independent of the other's power. The power of actor A is determined by the dependence of actor B: $\text{Power}(AB) = \text{Dependence}(BA)$. Likewise, the power of actor B is determined by the dependence of actor A. The dependence of each actor is determined independently as a function of the value of the goal sought and the number of alternative sources: $\text{Dep} = \text{Goal Value} \times 1/\text{Number of Alternatives}$ (Bacharach and Lawler 1980, p. 147-49). Bacharach and Lawler (1981a) have stressed the variable-sum assumption about power that remains implicit in Emerson's formulation. A "variable sum" assumption allows the possibility that one actor's power can increase without mandating a decrease in the other actor's power. Specifically, the power difference between actors can be constant, while the total power in the relationship (i.e., the sum of each actors power) varies across time in the same relationship, or across different relationships at the same point in time. Power relations can be symmetric or asymmetric in terms of relative power or high or low in terms of "total power" (Bacharach and

Lawler 1981a; Lawler 1986). Overall, power dependence theory can deal with subordinate, client power as well as superordinate, authority power in a way in which theories of authority cannot.

At first glance, one might think that any power in the authority-client relation would belong to the authority. Given the legitimacy and expertise of the authority, complete compliance of the client might be expected, and no bargaining would be possible. After all, the authority's rewards do come from the institution (salary, etc.) or from peers (friendship, respect), not from clients. The pertinent question is, how can the client have any control over these rewards and thereby a power base from which to influence the authority?

To answer this question, the authority's motivation to wield power must be analyzed. Role behavior as a major motivation for power wielding is suggested by Kipnis (1976). It is a central aspect of the authority's role to influence the client to behave in ways thought to increase the probability of goal attainment. Indeed, the continuation of institutional and peer rewards may depend on successful role performance by the authority, i.e., client behaving as prescribed and achieving the goal. Therefore, the client's behavior and goal achievement at least partially control the rewards of the authority by providing the primary means of evaluation of role performance. This control provides the client's power base. We assume that the asymmetric power relationship between authority and client derives primarily from the difference in the alternative sources of rewards not from a difference in goal value. The authority and the client presumably attach similar levels of value to the goal and, therefore, are equal on this dependence dimension. However, service organizations provide the authority with more clients than the client has authorities. The asymmetry in available alternatives is the foundation for unequal dependence and power.

Attribution

The behavioral expectations each actor has are not likely to be completely clear to the other. The ambiguity inherent to the situation gives rise to unexpected, perhaps unacceptable, behavioral requests which, in turn, lead to conflict. When conflict occurs, actors will consider whether and how to influence each other to obtain their desired end. But, prior to or simultaneously with the influence attempt, they are likely to try to understand the other's behavior by making attributions regarding the cause of the behavior. Attributions regarding the cause or source of observed behavior have been separated into three basic categories (Heider 1958; Jones and Davis 1965): (1) ability—an initial judgment regarding the actor's capability to enact a given behavior, (2) external—observed behavior can be related to factors outside of the individual actor, and (3) internal—observed behavior can be related to an internal trait of the individual actor. The nature of the attribution should have an impact on the response of an actor to the refusal of a request.

Attribution theory has been used in previous work on social power in two ways (Schopler and Layton 1974; Kipnis 1974, 1976). Schopler and Layton (1974) suggested that persons observing the effects of one actor's behavior on another will attribute power to the first actor if the second actor's behavioral change could not be tied to causes other than the behavior of the first actor. In contrast to Schopler and Layton's interpretation, however, we will follow Kipnis's perspective. Kipnis (1974, 1976) built his "treatment of choice" approach to power tactics on the assumption that the superordinate's attribution of causes for the subordinate's lack of satisfactory performance guides his or her choice of influence tactic. Specifically, actors ostensibly choose the tactics most likely to be effective, given the attributed reason for failure. Similarly, our theory

proposes that the subordinate client also attributes causes to the authority's failure to behave as requested and uses this attribution in choosing the influence tactic. These attributions of cause for the authority's reasons for refusing the client's request also can be thought of as the client's perceptions of the spoken or unspoken "account" for the authority's behavior (Scott and Lyman 1968).

Tactical Action

There is a substantial body of literature addressing tactical action. This literature is -not organized by any particular theory but is informed or guided by various perspectives, e.g., power dependence (Thibaut and Kelley 1959; Emerson 1962) and field theory (Cartwright and Zander 1968; French and Raven 1968; Tedeschi and Bonoma 1972). The most influential theoretical approach is that set forth by Emerson (1962) in his analysis of "balancing operations." Balancing operations are behaviors that change the power relationship; and, over time, the action and counteraction in the relationship tend to result in balance (i.e., equal power) and stability. Emerson's approach assumes that asymmetrical power relations produce tension, and that the balancing operations reduce the tension by moving the relation toward symmetry. There are four balancing operations, each of which corresponds with one of the four dimensions of dependence: A's goal value, A's alternative outcome sources, B's goal value, and B's alternative outcome sources. The power relationship can be altered by changing the actual or perceived importance of the goal or the alternative sources of the goal. Specifically, the tactics are (1) withdrawal—decrease the importance of goal to self, (2) extension of the network—develop alternative

sources of the rewards, (3) coalition formation—block other’s access to alternatives, and (4) status giving—increase value of goal to the other, or offer resources such as status.

These tactics have been adapted and studied by others. Michener and Suchner (1972) suggested (1) withdrawal, which decreases the value of the goal sought; (2) extension of power network by utilizing own alternatives; (3) outcome blockage by directly reducing resource supply from self or by forming coalitions with other suppliers; and (4) demand creation, which increases the value of resources supplied by self. In a similar way, Lawler and Bacharach (1976) examine four distinct tactics termed (1) conflict avoidance or resigning oneself to the present situation, (2) the threat to leave the relationship, (3) coalition formation, and (4) self-enhancement or increasing the value of self to the other. Regardless of the particular classification, these schemes define tactics as action that is designed to produce a change in the power relationship. Given the balance assumption, if these tactics are used successfully by a lower-power actor over time, that actor will find him or herself in a more advantageous position.

There is another set of tactics that may be useful in successfully influencing others but which does not attempt to alter the power relationship. These tactics assume or take for granted the existing power relationship and simply attempt to use it to advantage. Returning to the authority-client relationship, what bases does the client have for tactics that use the existing relationship? One of the client’s primary options is to invoke the norms that direct and constrain the authority’s behavior. Appeals to these norms or to the groups which authorized or endorsed them provide one power-use tactic to the client. This tactic has been termed the “activation of commitments” (Tedeschi and Bonoma 1972) and may include simple references to oneself as needy or dependent. Thus, appeals may be to the more general norm of social responsibility as well as to more specific professional service norms.

Clients also have the option of positive or negative sanctions if they control resources that can be used as sanctions. Clients control one resource that is particularly valuable to the authority—*cooperation*. The act of non-cooperation therefore is a sanction, a withholding of a valued resource. Another resource that clients control is their ability to appeal to the authority's superiors in an attempt to bring sanctions upon the authority indirectly. Direct punitive sanctions may also be attempted if the client is either more certain of his/her ability to sanction or if the client is provoked past the point of assessing the potential success or possible retribution.

Based on the foregoing discussion, tactics available to the client are divided into two sets: those that attempt to change the power relationship and those that attempt to use the existing power relationship. Within each of these groupings, there are four primary tactics:

I. ACT ON EXISTING POWER RELATIONSHIP

- A. Invoke service norms.
- B. Threaten to leave if authority does not comply.
- C. Apply indirect sanctions—appeal to higher authority.
- D. Apply direct sanction—directly punish or reward.

II. ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THE POWER RELATIONSHIP

- A. Decrease authority's power.
 - 1. Decrease own motivation, goal value.
 - 2. Develop alternative sources of the benefit.
- B. Increase own (client) power.
 - 1. Increase the motivation, goal value; of the authority.
 - 2. Form coalition with other clients.

Some examples may help to clarify the nature of these tactics. The four tactics included in the “Act on Existing Power Relationship” category are ones that attempt to influence the authority while taking the existing power relationship for granted. Invoking service norms (A) are attempts to persuade the authorities by reminding them of the normative constraints of their role. Client statements such as, “I thought government job service officials were supposed to help us get our benefits as smoothly as possible,” are an example of this type of tactical option. The second tactic, (B) threaten to leave, makes salient the authority’s role obligations and threatens to withhold the resource-cooperation. Apply indirect sanctions (C) makes use of the fact that authority systems entail multilevel legitimation; by appealing to the hierarchical levels above the particular authority figure, the client can bring the pressure of the authorizing body upon the authority. The fourth tactic in the section, (D) direct sanctions, includes attempts to punish, reward, or withdraw previous rewards in order to influence the authority to yield. Direct physical action or bribes could be included, although in the settings relevant here, these tactics are uncommon. Less obvious means of rewarding or punishing are entirely possible and quite common. For example, statements containing words of praise and compliments, promises to tell other actors about the “good job” the authority is doing are all types of rewards which may be acceptable in these settings. Conversely, words of criticism and insults, promises to tell others how badly the authority is doing are punishments. The tactics in this first category attempt to influence the authority directly while leaving the existing power relationship intact, but tactics in the second category contain attempts to alter the power relationship.

The second set of tactics, “Attempt to Change the Power Relationship,” is based in power-dependence theory. The first two seek to decrease the client’s dependence and thereby the authority’s power by (A1) decreasing the importance of the long-term goal to the self, or by (A2)

developing alternative sources of the desired outcomes. The second two seek to increase the authority's dependence and thereby the client's power by (B1) increasing the motivation (goal value) of the authority through increases in the value of the outcomes that can be provided by the client, and by (B2) blocking the pursuit of outcomes from alternative clients by forming coalitions with them. While coalitions of health-care clients are still infrequent, collective action by university students and by political action groups is common, providing a good example of coalition formation by clients.

In the next section, we propose a theory of tactical action that links the choice of tactics within each of these two general categories to the power relationship and to the client's judgment regarding the reasons for the authority's refusal to grant a request. This relationship is seen in the context of a legitimized asymmetrical power structure. The theory should be considered an initial and preliminary attempt to develop a foundation for explaining the response of clients to a refusal of a request by the "service provider."

THE THEORY

The theory assumes a conflict situation, stemming primarily from ambiguous behavioral expectations. Specifically, the client has made a request of an authority, which was expected to be consistent with the relationship, and the authority has refused to grant the request. Now the client must make two decisions—*whether to attempt influence*, and if so, *how to influence the authority*. These decisions and the theoretically relevant aspects of the situation are presented in Figure 1. The Figure portrays the power-dependence dimensions at points one and two—the client's goal value and number of alternative service providers available to the client. In the

center are the attributed reasons for the authority's refusal and on the right are the client's predicted tactic choices.

The basic assumption of the theory is one common to social exchange approaches—that actors attempt to maximize their own outcomes. For authority- client relations this amounts to increasing their profits by either maximizing their positively valued outcomes or minimizing their costs, or both. The costs, which may be required for attainment of the long-term goal (i.e., the change in the client's condition or situation desired by both actors), can include time, money, effort, discomforts, and other unrelated but valued activities which must be foregone while in pursuit of this goal. The benefit requested by the client decreases the costs necessary for the achievement of the long-term goal, thereby maximizing profit by minimizing cost. The costs attached to the long-term goal can be perceived as fair or unfair; and, the value of the benefit depends in part on the client's perception of the fairness of these required costs. If the costs of obtaining the goal are judged to be unfairly high, the value of the cost-reducing benefit will be higher. The perception of fairness of costs, in turn, depends in part on the "validity" of the system. The more valid the system, the more likely the costs will be perceived as "compatible" or fair, i.e., Zelditch and Walker (1984).

Once the initial request for the cost-reducing benefit has been refused, the client must decide whether to pursue the benefit and what tactics to use. The implications of the above utilitarian assumption for the client's decisions are (1) the client will choose the tactic which is judged to have the greatest subjective probability of success in obtaining the requested benefit; and (2) if prospects for successful influence are low, the client will choose to minimize additional costs by avoiding further conflict. This avoidance can be accomplished either by

complying with the authority's refusal or by withdrawing from the relationship. The theory amplifies and explicates each of these implications.

Decision to Attempt Influence

On the far left in the theoretical model is the client's first decision point— whether to attempt influence. Two subdimensions of Emerson's (1962, 1972) motivational investment or outcome value are important for this decision: the value of the goal and the value of the immediate benefit. When the value of the benefit is high the client is more likely to pursue it, i.e., if the client is a worker who has been "laid off" suddenly and has requested immediate benefits from the state unemployment office. When the value of the longer term goal is high, the client is more dependent on the authority and therefore is less likely to challenge the authority by pursuing the benefit, i.e., when the client (unemployed worker) believes the employment picture is bleak and highly values obtaining a good job through the state employment office. The relative importance of the value of the immediate benefit and the value of the long-term goal are expected to affect the client's decision to attempt influence.

Insert Figure 1 Here

While each subdimension has a separate effect on the client's decision, it is the relation between the two that is the most important. The question is: how might clients balance the immediate or short-term benefits and the long-term goal? For example, when an unemployed worker, while suffering financial distress and wishing to pursue the unemployment benefits,

values the long-term goal of finding a new job more highly than the immediate benefit, he or she is less likely to challenge the authority's refusal of the benefits than another unemployed worker in great distress for whom the immediate benefit is more highly valued. The latter person is more likely to attempt influence that may disrupt the relationship because the immediate financial relief is of more value to him or her than the longer term goal. Thus, a decision to attempt influence is most likely when the value of the requested benefit is high in relation to the goal.

The following proposition specifies this effect.

P1. *The greater the value of the immediate benefit compared to the value of the goal, the more likely the client is to attempt influence.*

If the client chooses to avoid conflict, i.e., not exert influence, two alternate behaviors are possible: compliance or withdrawal from the relationship. Our hypothesis is that while the relative value of the benefit is the primary factor in decisions to attempt influence, the absolute value of the goal is the primary factor in determining what action to take if no influence is attempted. The first action, to comply with the authority's refusal and remain in the relationship, is most likely to occur when the value of the goal is high. The second, to leave the relationship, is more likely when the value of this goal is lower. Thus the following proposition is suggested.

P2. *Given a decision to avoid conflict, the higher the value of the goal, the more likely the client is to comply with the authority's refusal; and the lower the value of the goal, the more likely the client is to withdraw from the relationship.*

Our theory assumes that the two power-dependence dimensions are important to different decisions. The outcome-value or “motivational investment” should be particularly important to decisions on whether to attempt influence, while alternative outcome sources should be particularly important to choices among tactical options. In the next section, we will argue that it is the client’s alternatives that are most important to the choice of tactic once a decision to attempt influence has been made. However, before proceeding to that discussion it should be noted that the goal value or motivational investment may have some impact on tactic choices, especially the choice between the two broad tactic categories: “act on existing relationship” or “attempt to change the power relationship.” Given that a decision to attempt influence has been made, the higher the value of the short-term benefit, the more likely the client will adopt tactics that use the existing power relationship; and the higher the client values the long-term goal, the more likely the use of tactics that alter the existing power relationship. Emphasis on long-term outcomes will lead to use of tactics that are effective over the long term; emphasis on short-term outcomes will lead to use of tactics which are based in the present situation.

Selection of Tactics

Actors ostensibly assess the prospects of success for each tactic and choose the tactic with the greatest subjective probability of success. If the chosen tactic fails, they will move to some other tactic, once again basing their choice on the perceived probability of success of the remaining tactics. There are two broad, interrelated notions in previous work on tactics that elaborate and explain how the probability of success principle might operate: a “treatment of

choice” metaphor (Kipnis 1974, 1976, 1984) and a “vulnerability” assumption (Lawler and Bacharach 1976; Bacharach and Lawler 1980, chap. 7). Each of these is discussed in turn below.

According to Kipnis (1974, 1976) a two-stage process is involved in choosing tactics. First, the source of influence must diagnose the reasons for the target’s refusal to comply with the request. That is, the source analyzes the situation and determines the most likely reason for the target’s noncompliant behavior. Second, the source chooses tactics that are most likely to succeed, given the diagnosed reason for refusal. The accuracy of the diagnoses is irrelevant to the tactic choice; although it may well be central to the tactic’s success, a question with which neither Kipnis nor our theory will deal. The key point is that these diagnosed reasons are the foundation for the attachment of success probabilities to different tactics.

The vulnerability assumption of Bacharach and Lawler (1980) is an extension of Kipnis’ treatment of choice notion. The purpose of this extension is to link the treatment of choice and specifically the probability of success principle to the power relationship. The vulnerability notion can be broken down into two interrelated assumptions; first, actors in conflict will analyze the power-dependence relationship (alternative outcome sources and goal value) and identify points of weakness and strength in each other’s power position. Second, actors will opt for tactics which use or are directed at the other’s points of weakness or one’s own points of strength. In other words, an analysis of each other’s vulnerability determines the probability of success attached to various tactical options.

At this point, our theory deals only with tactics chosen first or second (in the event that the first choice fails). As Figure 1 suggests, the choice of tactics (both the first and second choice) is based (1) on the degree to which the clients have other authorities from whom they may seek the desired services, and (2) on the client’s attribution of the authority’s reasons for

refusal. The implications of the interaction of power-dependence conditions and the reasons for refusal will be considered next.

The alternatives of the client and the authority along with the value each assigns to the goal determine their relative power positions. We assume that both actors are approximately equal on the goal-value dimension at the outset, but that this dimension can be manipulated in the course of their interaction. Note that two of the power change tactics manipulate the goal value. The alternatives dimension of dependence can be conceptualized in at least three ways—the absolute number of alternative sources of outcomes, the range of resources controlled by various alternatives, and the magnitude of the resources controlled by these alternatives. We restrict our use of the alternatives dimension here to *number* of alternative sources and portray this as high vs. low. Furthermore, to avoid undue complexity in this initial formulation of the theory, we are assuming that the authority's alternative sources, i.e., other clients, are moderate in number. Given the hierarchical structure of service organizations, the authority is assumed to have more alternatives than the client. What determines the likelihood of the client choosing tactics that utilize the authority's alternatives is most likely the social and physical proximity of the other clients. The implication of varying the number of the sources of the requested benefit is that when these are high, the client is more likely to develop alternatives (all other things being equal); and conversely, when the number of alternatives is low, the client is more likely to attempt to influence within the present relationship.

Consistent with Kipnis (1974, 1976, 1984), the theory indicates that the client will infer the reasons for the authority's refusal and consider these reasons when evaluating the tactical options. Because the client in our theory is interacting with a target in a legitimized power position, a third diagnostic category, institutional, is added to the two emphasized by Kipnis—

lack of motivation and lack of ability. The additional category includes those reasons that are legitimized by institutional or professional norms which may prohibit granting the request.

The column to the right of the Alternatives in Figure 1 represents the client's perception of the authority's reason for refusal. The perception of an institutional reason for refusal is an external attribution, to a rule or norm of the institution, and, therefore, will probably apply to all other authority figures within the institution. The attribution of attitude as a reason for refusal is an internal one, which implies that the authority is unmotivated to help and that the refusal was willful. This follows closely the formulation of Kipnis. The ability attribution implies that the authority is unable to perform the requested behavior, i.e., that the authority lacks competence.

Each of the three reasons for refusal suggests certain tactics and rules out other tactics. An institutional reason legitimizes the refusal; the validity of the institution supports the authority's refusal. The clients infer that not only does this specific authority have a legitimate reason for refusal but other authorities are likely to respond similarly; therefore, the clients are less likely to use their alternatives, i.e., alternative authorities. With institutional reasons, the power-dependence conditions will not affect tactic choices. The use of sanctions, particularly appealing to higher authority, would not be perceived as useful because the authority's refusal is already legitimized by the higher authority, and any use of sanctions would be unlikely to succeed. Two tactics remain for the client—invoking service norms and cognitively decreasing the value of the requested benefit or of the goal. Invoking service norms attempts to counter the norms prohibiting the benefit with those that promote client well-being and hopefully the benefit as a part of this well-being. If neither of these tactics is successful, the client is left with the original option—to withdraw the request and comply with the authorities' refusal or to leave.

Either way, the client will first cognitively decrease the value of the benefit and, in order to leave, the value of the goal itself. Thus, the following propositions are suggested:

P3. *If the authority's reason for refusal is institutional, the client is more likely to appeal to service norms.*

P4. *If the authority's reason for refusal is institutional and if appeals to norms are not successful, the client is more likely to cognitively decrease the value of the benefit or goal.*

When the client infers that the authority has refused because of an attitudinal reason—lack of motivation to grant the benefit, two tactics are most likely. The first, develop alternative sources, is most likely to succeed when alternatives are high; with low alternatives, however, attempts to increase the authority's motivation by increasing the value of the client's goal achievement would become the most likely choice. If alternative authorities are few in number and if attempts to increase the authority's valuing of the long-term goal are unsuccessful, the client will try to form a coalition with the other clients, i.e., authority's alternatives. If coalitions do not succeed, the client will use sanctions to influence the authority. The likely tactic choices given the attitudinal attribution and the alternative conditions are presented in the following propositions.

P5. *If the authority's reason for refusal is attitudinal, the client with high alternatives is likely to develop alternatives, and the client with low alternatives is likely to attempt to increase the authority's goal value.*

P6. *If the authority's reason for refusal is attitudinal and if the first tactic is unsuccessful, the client is likely to attempt to form a coalition with other clients or apply sanctions if coalitions are not possible.*

When an authority's refusal appears to be due to the lack of ability to grant the request, an interesting situation ensues. Making this kind of attribution to an authority figure ought to weaken the legitimized power relation which underlies the entire model. Researchers have concluded, however, that incompetence of an authority figure does not necessarily undermine the expectation of compliance by the subordinate actor (Zelditch 1972; Smith 1984). A client who is faced with the situation of an incompetent authority has few tactics to choose from, other than developing an alternative. Attempts to influence an incompetent authority are unlikely to be successful in obtaining the benefit; therefore, when alternative authorities are available, the use of them would be the tactic with the highest probability of success. If there are few alternatives, and the client values the goal or benefit too highly to leave the relationship, the only viable tactic is sanctioning.

P7. *If the authority's reason for refusal is ability, the client with high alternatives is likely to develop alternatives, and the client with low alternatives is likely to decrease his/her own goal value.*

P8. *If the authority's reason for refusal is ability and if the first tactic is unsuccessful, the client is likely to attempt to apply sanctions.*

CONCLUSIONS

Clients seeking services from organizations enter exchange relationships with the representatives of these organizations. The organizational representatives possess the ability to provide assistance to clients because of their position in the organization and the competence or expertise brought to the organization. The “service providers” are legitimate authorities in the sense that their superordinate position is authorized by the larger organization (Zelditch and Walker 1984) and endorsed by subordinates. Within a social-exchange framework (Blau 1964; Homans 1974), clients who desire services and cannot reciprocate the services in kind will, as a substitute, accord the service provider with respect, esteem, and compliance. This exchange will support the existing hierarchical structure. Thus, the authority structure sets parameters around and unleashes exchange processes at the micro level that are consistent with the structure and which strengthen it.

From social exchange theory, however, authority-client relations are exchanges in an even more fundamental sense. Given the larger organizational and institutional context, the client controls “commodities” that are of value to the authority and, consequently, the dependence in the relationship is clearly mutual. The authority is responsible for and obligated to produce for the client conditions or events that are ultimately under the control of the client. The authority's performance and success in the organization are contingent on the client following the directions and advice of the authority. “Good” service providers not only choose the right service to

provide but also persuade the client to comply with the requirements of the service. Thus, while authority-client relationships involve asymmetrical power, the dependencies are mutual to a significant degree, and the power difference is far from extreme. The overall implication is that even in these “authority-ridden” relationships, there is likely to be more variation and flux in the power relationship than would be suggested by notions of legitimacy and authority. The variation and flux can be treated as a process of bargaining and negotiation.

As conflicts arise within these relations, not only does the authority-client relationship enter an unstable phase, but the social structure itself may be questioned. As the client struggles to gain an advantage in influencing the authority’s behavior, the tactics chosen either attempt to change the power-dependence relationship or to selectively use aspects of the structure itself to bring about the desired change in the authority’s behavior. The former tactics, if successful, produce a change in the authority-client relationship, while the latter leave the structure of that relationship intact.

Initially, the client decides whether the requested benefit is of high enough value relative to the overall goal to be worth pursuing. Once the client decides to pursue the benefit, the influence tactic(s) are selected based on two conditions— the client’s available alternatives and the client’s judgment regarding the authority’s reasons for refusing the initial request. According to the theory, the choice of tactic is a function of an interaction between the authority’s reasons for refusing the client’s request and the number of alternative outcome sources for the client (i.e., service providers). The tactics having the highest probability of success given these conditions are selected.

This article represents an effort to extend work on superordinate-subordinate relations to a specific type of asymmetric relation, authority-client. Such relations are becoming increasingly

prevalent in postindustrial societies. Influence tactics, that can be used by clients, are identified and analyzed within the context provided by structural properties of the service provider-client relationship. As clients demand more input into decisions regarding the type and quality of services provided, knowledge of influence tactics and the process of choice from among these tactics is critical to an understanding of this political activity.

Figure 1

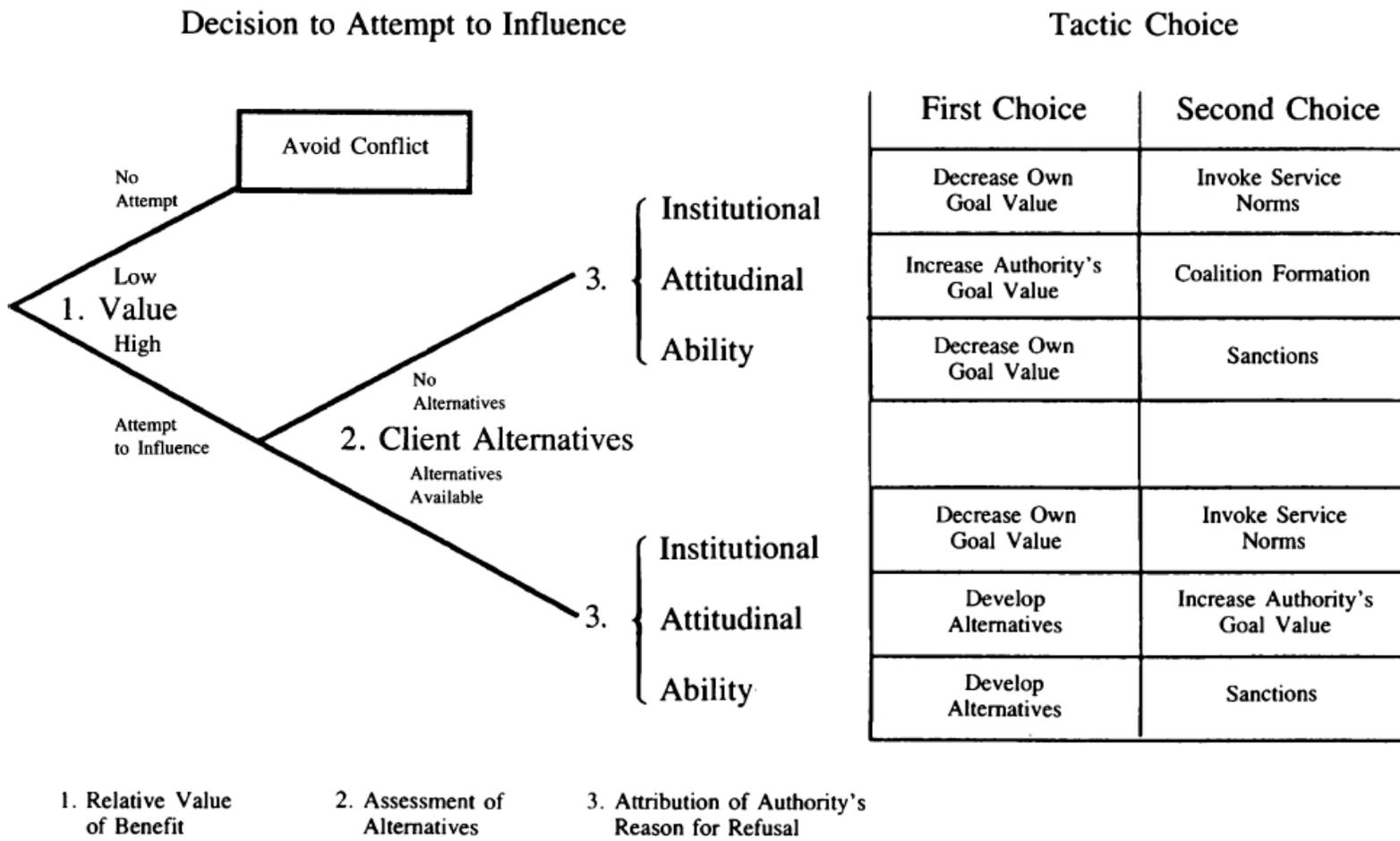


Figure 1. Tactic Choice by Client's Alternatives and Authority's Reasons for Refusal.

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