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An Attitude-Behavior Framework for Distribution Channel Management

The consistency or inconsistency of boundary personnel attitudes and behavior forms the basis for a model that predicts the influence processes that need to be implemented and the influence objectives that need to be sought in a focal organization's attempts to gain acceptance of its distribution channel programs. Propositions are developed concerning (1) the communication strategies that can be used most effectively in implementing the influence processes, and (2) how the relative importance of the decision on a channel program should be related to the nature of the approach taken to implement each influence process.

NOW more than ever, the effective coordination and maintenance of interorganizational exchange relationships in distribution channels are of extreme importance to business practitioners. Markets are becoming, in Arndt's (1979) words, "increasingly domesticated," where exchanges of products, services, and information are occurring on a long-term basis relative to the past. Rather than resort to a swift termination of a relationship when problems arise, personnel of different organizations must learn to resolve their differences and problems and work together so as to achieve increased levels of interfirm coordination and cooperation.¹

Research in the marketing channels literature has

provided some insights into the ways ongoing channel relationships can be effectively maintained and coordinated. However, as Reve and Stern (1979) indicate, the emphasis here has been on the constructs of power and conflict and not on the alternative influence processes and communication strategies available to a firm's personnel in seeking the adoption and implementation of distribution channel programs. Little if any attention has been paid to developing models that predict when and where given influence approaches and strategies are relatively appropriate. There exists only an acknowledgment that the efficient selection and application of varying strategies is highly complex (cf. Bucklin 1973).

The objective of this article is to develop a normative conceptual framework that will promote the effectiveness of influence attempts between organizations in ongoing channel relationships. Toward this end, an attitude-behavior model for distribution channel management will be presented that rests on the prevailing attitudes and behavior of boundary personnel of target organizations toward a channel program of a focal organization (e.g., a manufacturer or a retailer).² The model serves to integrate the cognitive-

¹The effective coordination and maintenance of ongoing channel relationships are especially critical where (1) the exchange relationship is of major importance to the participating organizations, (2) few alternative suppliers or resellers exist in the marketplace, (3) widespread availability of the product or service is a necessity, and (4) channel entry barriers are critical in feeding off competitive trends into the market.

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²The term *boundary personnel* is used here in referring to individuals who have responsibility for facilitating transactions and managing exchanges of products, services, and information with personnel of other organizations within a distribution channel.

oriented psychological paradigm with the behavior modification paradigm (cf. Rothschild and Gaidis 1981). Prestudy interviews with approximately 40 boundary personnel in the automobile, industrial supply, and department store channels (e.g., owner/managers, buyers, and salespeople) guided the development of the framework and the entire article.

The Attitude-Behavior Framework

Decision Makers within Distribution Channel Relationships

A major question arises initially about whether or not the concept of attitude, the process of attitude change, and interpersonal influence processes are applicable and relevant in interorganizational exchange relationships within distribution channels. The answer is clearly yes, but with some qualification.

In many organizations, especially those that are small to medium-sized, one person can have primary if not sole responsibility for all interactions with associated channel members and for making decisions based on these interactions. For example, Frazier (1983) reports that one individual in most automobile dealerships, referred to as the "dealer principal," has primary responsibility in handling manufacturer relations. Boundary personnel from other organizations must attempt to reinforce or change the attitudes and behavior of such individuals.

Even in large organizations, one person can have primary authority to make certain decisions relating to interorganizational exchange relationships. For example, while the owner of a large industrial distributorship may have ultimate responsibility for managing supplier relations, the distributorship's sales manager may be given a great deal of responsibility for making day to day decisions relating to its salesforce. Again, one person's attitudes and behavior are of major importance, although only on an issue to issue basis.

The most complex situation is where multiple actors within an organization have major responsibility for a variety of the same interorganizational decisions. For example, within many chain store operations, centrally located buying committees have responsibility for deciding which products and trade promotions to accept from alternative suppliers (Chevalier and Curhan 1976). Where multiple actors have a major role in making a given decision, the attitude of interest within the organization toward a specific channel program will be based on either (1) a "consensus" among the relevant actors, or (2) the attitude of the most powerful individual or coalition (cf. Bacharach and Lawler 1980). The group acting as a whole or the most powerful individual/coalition will make the decision whether or not to participate. This only

indicates that an interfirm influence attempt can involve either one individual or several individuals from each firm, depending upon how many have responsibility for managing channel relationships with other business organizations. Attitudes, the process of attitude change, and interpersonal influence processes will still be of major relevance.

The Attitude-Behavior Model

Traditional attitude theory predicts that individuals' attitudes toward a behavior will determine whether or not they will perform that behavior. However, as Smith and Swinyard (1983) among many others have pointed out, mounting evidence indicates that attitudes are not very good predictors of overt behavior. While attitudes and behavior are usually positively related in an aggregate analysis and, therefore, generally consistent, there will typically exist a significant number of cases where they are inconsistent or at odds with one another (Roedder, Sternthal, and Calder 1983; Sheth and Frazier 1982).

The model presented in Table 1 takes the inconsistency of attitudes and behavior in certain cases as a given. Its two dimensions are (1) attitude toward a channel program within the organization (whether positive, neutral, or negative), and (2) behavior of the organization relating to the channel program (whether to accept or reject). As such, the model is applicable to channel decisions where the behavioral alternatives are dichotomous and a channel member's participation in the program is voluntary. Examples of such decisions at the retail or wholesale level in a channel include whether or not to participate in manufacturer-sponsored programs (e.g., sales promotion programs), or add a new product line. From the opposite perspective, manufacturer response to a retailer's or wholesaler's request to make a special presentation at a sales meeting or improve product delivery could be treated in the model.

Based on the varying attitude-behavior conditions exhibited in Table 1, six influence processes are identified, along with corresponding influence objectives. Each of these processes will now be developed, together with a number of preliminary propositions dealing with the communication strategies most appropriate to use in implementing them and the impact on them of decision importance. Table 2 categorizes and defines the communication strategies considered herein, identified through an extensive literature review and prestudy interviews. The strategies dealing with verbal communication range from relatively implicit and unfocused (i.e., the indirect strategies), to direct, focused, and pressurized (i.e., the direct, mediated strategies). The information exchange, information control, modeling, recommendation, and warning strategies center on attitude reinforcement and/or

TABLE 1
The Attitude-Behavior Model: Alternative Influence Processes and Objectives

	Attitude Toward the Channel Program		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
	cell 1	cell 2	cell 3
Accept	Reinforcement Process 1. Behavioral reinforcement 2. Psychological reinforcement	Moderate Rationalization Process Attitude change	Radical Rationalization Process Attitude change
Behavior Toward the Channel Program			
Reject	cell 4 Inducement Process Behavioral change	cell 5 Moderate Confrontation Process 1. Behavioral change 2. Attitude change	cell 6 Radical Confrontation Process 1. Behavioral change 2. Attitude change

change (the inherent desirability of the channel program), while the rest of the strategies in Table 2 center on behavioral reinforcement and/or change. The reward and punishment strategies are the only non-verbal ones identified in Table 2 in the sense that no prior notice is given or request made before the reward (punishment) is given.

Reinforcement process. Given that a firm has a program it desires to implement in its channel system, boundary personnel of all associated organizations must be so informed. After this informing process, some boundary personnel will likely form a positive attitude toward the program's inherent desirability and accept the program because of its anticipated benefits (cell 1 in Table 1). This is, of course, the immediate goal of the influence attempt with each boundary person. However, even when attitudes and behavior are consistent, and in the desired direction, some actions on the part of the focal organization's personnel will usually be required to (1) keep the boundary personnel and their organizations in this cell, (2) promote commitment to the program and a strong effort to carry it out effectively, and (3) enhance the chance that they will participate in similar programs in the future (cf. Hunt 1970). Toward these ends, a *reinforcement process* is appropriate to facilitate, centering on the objective of either behavioral reinforcement, psychological reinforcement, or both.

Behavioral reinforcement is accomplished by providing rewards to the boundary personnel after their agreement to participate in the program (Nord and Peter 1980, Rothschild and Gaidis 1981). This is done to reinforce the behavior and is not tied to boundary person attitudes about the inherent desirability of the program itself, although reinforced behavior can also subsequently lead to reinforced attitudes, and vice versa (Howard and Sheth 1969, Sheth and Raju 1973). Rewards of a noneconomic nature (at least directly) are clearly appropriate, based on goodwill, responsiveness, and cooperation between the boundary person-

nel of each organization. Examples include sending a "thank you card" to the boundary person, giving approval and complimenting the boundary person on general job performance (i.e., giving esteem), notifying the boundary person first of competitor marketing strategy (i.e., provision of information), reducing the order cycle time and improving general product delivery for the boundary person's firm, and being more cooperative on product allocations. The positive, normative strategy can also be used in building the impression that the boundary personnel's organizations are "good and loyal" channel members. It is also clear that special economic rewards are given to boundary personnel at times in the form of differential pricing schedules, freight terms, and promotional allowances, as well as gifts and entertainment.³ However, this is questionable on both legal and cost grounds. Moreover, the giving of special economic rewards can actually have negative effects on a firm's reputation and its general channel relations (cf. Hill, Alexander, and Cross 1975). For example, if special economic rewards are given to one boundary person but not to others, and this becomes generally known within the channel, considerable intrachannel conflict can arise (*Industrial Distribution* 1983). For all these reasons, noneconomic rewards are generally preferable.

P1: Behavioral reinforcement is best accomplished in channel relationships through use of the noneconomic reward and positive/normative strategies.

On the other hand, in seeking *psychological reinforcement*, intrinsic rewards are given to reinforce

³This appears to be especially prominent where (1) competition is high, (2) the industry economy is poor, (3) a firm's products are undifferentiated and its market position is weak, (4) exchange relationships are of great importance, (5) channel member classes and sizes vary widely, and (6) the organizations involved lack national visibility.

TABLE 2
Descriptions of Influence Strategy Categories and Communication Strategies Considered in this Study

Indirect Influence Strategies: Information on general business issues and the channel program is merely exchanged with boundary personnel. It is left to them to process the information and make conclusions relating to the channel program. Furthermore, no specific action is directly requested.

1. Information exchange: An actor uses discussions on general business issues relating to the channel program where information and/or opinions are presented on its inherent desirability (Raven and Kruglanski 1970).
2. Information control: An actor uses discussions on general business issues relating to the channel program, where objective information on its inherent desirability is either withheld or manipulated in some way (Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma 1973).
3. Modeling: An actor provides examples of other boundary personnel, similar to the one in question, who have (a) a positive attitude on the inherent desirability of the channel program, and (b) accepted it (Nord and Peter 1980).

Direct, Unmediated Strategies: Consequences of the acceptance or rejection of the channel program and/or its implementation are stressed, but these consequences are based on a response from the market environment, not on the mediation of the actor or the focal organization. Conclusion drawing and dramatic statements of benefits or ill effects are used. A specific action is implied, if not specifically requested.

1. Recommendation: An actor stresses that participation in the channel program and its effective implementation is very desirable, as this will enhance the goal attainment of the boundary person's firm because of a favorable customer reaction (Angelmar and Stern 1978).
2. Warning: An actor stresses that failure to participate in the channel program and effectively carry it out is very undesirable, as this will hamper the goal attainment of the boundary person's firm because of foregoing a favorable customer reaction (Angelmar and Stern 1978; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma 1973).
3. Positive normative: An actor indicates that boundary person participation in the program would be in conformity with channel norms, stating or implying a "good" or "loyal" channel member "ought to" participate (Angelmar and Stern 1978).
4. Negative normative: An actor indicates that boundary person failure to participate in the program is in violation of channel norms, stating or implying only a "poor" or "disloyal" channel member would not participate (Angelmar and Stern 1978).

Reward and Punishment Strategies: Rewards or punishments are directly given to boundary personnel and their firms with no prior notice. No corresponding action is asked for on their part (Angelmar and Stern 1978; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma 1973).

1. Economic reward: A form of financial reward is given to the boundary person and/or the firm (e.g., a special "bill back" percentage, a special advertising allowance).
2. Noneconomic reward: A form of nonfinancial reward is given to the boundary person and/or the firm (e.g., an improvement in the "delivery system"), although it could serve to improve the firm's subsequent financial goal attainment.
3. Economic punishment: A form of financial penalty is given to the boundary person and/or the firm (e.g., lowered advertising allowance).
4. Noneconomic punishment: A form of nonfinancial penalty is given to the boundary person and/or the firm (e.g., a worsened delivery system), although it could serve to influence adversely the firm's subsequent financial goal attainment.

Direct Unweighted Strategy or Request: The actor merely communicates desires or wishes concerning boundary personnel acceptance of the channel program; no consequences of acceptance or rejection are mentioned or implied (Kelman 1961).

Direct Mediated Strategies: A specific action is requested; consequences of acceptance or rejection are stressed and are based on the mediation of the actor and/or the focal organization.

1. Personal plea: The actor stresses to the boundary person that either their friendship or debts he/she is owed require acceptance of the program, implying that its acceptance will improve their personal working relationship, while its rejection will worsen their personal working relationship (Raven and Kruglanski 1970).
2. Promise: The actor indicates the boundary person's firm will receive future mediated inducements (e.g., more cooperation on product allocation) for the acceptance of the program (Angelmar and Stern 1978; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma 1973).
3. Threat: The actor indicates negative sanctions will be applied to the boundary person's firm (e.g., give less cooperation on product allocation) should the program be rejected (Angelmar and Stern 1978; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma 1973).
4. Legalistic reference: The actor refers to some legal standard existing in the relationship and argues that it implies that boundary personnel should participate in the channel program (Marwell and Schmitt 1967).

boundary personnel beliefs of the program's inherent desirability. Positive information on the program and its benefits would be given to reaffirm the correctness of this positive attitude. Furthermore, examples could be given of other boundary personnel (similar to the ones in question) who have agreed to participate in the program and are enthusiastic about its potential benefits (Nord and Peter 1980). Boundary personnel here must be allowed to process this positive oriented information themselves, so as to reinforce their previous conclusions relating to the channel program. Finally, a form of noneconomic reward could be given by complimenting the boundary personnel for their decision to participate in the program, thereby giving esteem and encouragement. Therefore, while noneconomic rewards primarily center on behavioral reinforcement or change, one form of this can also be used effectively to promote psychological reinforcement.⁴

- P2: Psychological reinforcement is best accomplished in channel relationships through use of the information exchange, modeling, and noneconomic reward strategies.

For decisions on channel programs that are perceived by boundary personnel to be relatively unimportant based on their potential impact on their firms' goal attainment (e.g., the decision to allow another firm's sales manager to make a presentation at a sales meeting), behavioral reinforcement is likely to be more critical to seek than psychological reinforcement (Rothschild and Gaidis 1981, Sheth and Raju 1973). Relatively little cognitive activity and evaluation is likely to exist for such programs (Ray 1982, Sternthal and Craig 1982). Given this lack of a thorough evaluation, drawing attention to the program and its design can actually serve to raise doubts about the desirability of the program and the decision to accept it (Hunt 1970). Rather, the learning of behavior patterns should be sought. This appears questionable only where it is apparent to the focal organization's personnel that boundary personnel lack an extreme positive attitude and lack confidence initially in their evaluation of the program. In such cases, commitment to the program is in doubt and, therefore, psychological reinforcement can be equally critical.

On the other hand, psychological reinforcement is likely to be most critical for decisions on channel programs that are seen to be relatively important by the boundary personnel (e.g., the decision to adopt a new product line) (Rothschild and Gaidis 1981, Sheth and

Raju 1973). Considerable cognitive activity and evaluation probably will exist for such programs; the internalization of the desirability of the program must be sought and reinforced (Ray 1982, Sternthal and Craig 1982). This appears critical even where relatively strong positive attitudes exist, considering the possibility of attitude decay and the need to promote commitment in the program. This reasoning is not meant to suggest that only one or the other type of reinforcement should be sought per channel program. In fact, wherever possible, both should be strived for, especially in a focal organization's most important exchange relationships.

- P3: Where the acceptance and implementation of a channel program represent a relatively unimportant decision to boundary personnel, behavioral reinforcement is a relatively critical objective, unless the strength of their positive attitudes is relatively low.
- P4: Where the acceptance and implementation of a channel program represent a relatively important decision to boundary personnel, psychological reinforcement is a relatively critical objective.
- P5: Both behavioral and psychological reinforcement should be generally sought, especially in a firm's most important exchange relationships.

Rationalization processes. Other boundary personnel may accept the channel program, but with only a neutral or negative attitude toward its inherent desirability (cells 2 and 3 in Table 1). In such cases, boundary personnel participation can be due to a host of reasons, including a desire to promote goodwill, avoid a confrontation, or build up credits they can use later on. Perhaps few if any of their other suppliers (or resellers) are offering a similar program at the time, so they feel there is little opportunity cost in accepting it. Unfortunately, because boundary personnel here do not strongly believe in the program, their motivation to implement it effectively is in serious doubt. For example, empirical results in Chevalier and Curhan (1976) suggest that many retailers who accept manufacturer trade promotions fail to implement them properly and give them even modest promotional support (also see Quelch 1983). Such a lack of commitment and carry-through is most likely to occur where boundary personnel have neutral and, especially, negative attitudes toward a program.

Where a neutral attitude exists (cell 2), a moderate rationalization process is required in an attempt to generate attitude change, so that boundary personnel attitudes will be consistent with behavior. A reasonably persuasive influence approach needs to be un-

⁴See Fox and Fox (1974) for an excellent treatment of both behavioral and psychological reinforcement and ways to facilitate them.

undertaken, with information on the program's benefits presented to the boundary personnel. The positive consequences of effectively implementing the program must be stressed. Conclusion drawing is needed on the part of the focal organization's personnel. As such, use of the recommendation strategy is most appropriate. Furthermore, the modeling strategy could be used in conjunction with recommendations. Examples of boundary personnel solidly behind the program would be more strongly stated compared to those used in attempting to achieve psychological reinforcement.

P6: The moderate rationalization process is most effectively implemented in channel relationships through use of the recommendation and modeling strategies.

Where boundary personnel have accepted the program but exhibit a negative attitude toward its desirability, a *radical rationalization process* (cell 3 in Table 1) needs to be implemented by the focal organization. Similar to the moderate rationalization process, *attitude change* is the influence objective. However, accomplishing this objective will be much more difficult than before, as the probability of attitude change varies inversely with its strength (Smith and Swinyard 1983). One of two general influence approaches could be appropriate. First, where the extremity of the negative attitude is high and boundary personnel are very confident of their evaluation of the program, an attempt at a large attitude change in a short time will likely fail (Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall 1965); people resist change in strongly held beliefs and attitudes, and do so through selective information processing (Ray 1982). A strongly worded, persuasive message in such cases will probably not be accepted or tolerated by the boundary personnel. Therefore, a relatively conservative influence approach needs to be taken where positive information on the program is exchanged with boundary personnel, but where positive statements on its benefits are not blatantly or dramatically made (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, Johnson 1966). Examples of others solidly behind the program could be given but in a very low-key fashion. Conclusions should not be made by the focal organization's personnel, as this could result in a solidification or polarization of the initial negative attitude (Brethun 1966). In other words, a "soft sell" is required. Attitude change would be attempted very slowly and incrementally.

P7: Where negative attitudes are extreme and confidently held, the radical rationalization process is most effectively implemented in channel relationships through the subtle use of the information exchange and modeling strategies.

On the other hand, where the negative attitude is not extreme and boundary personnel lack confidence in their evaluation of the program, a relatively persuasive influence approach is required, compared to the one taken to facilitate the moderate rationalization process. Information on the benefits of the program and its effective implementation must be presented to the boundary personnel in a dramatic fashion. Conclusion drawing is needed and done with enthusiasm. Warnings also appear to be appropriate, especially where it is clear that a boundary person is not carrying through on earlier promises and is not implementing the program effectively. Furthermore, examples of boundary personnel solidly behind the program can be dramatically given, with testimonials used wherever possible. A "hard sell" is recommended in this case.

P8: Where negative attitudes are not extreme and confidence in them is lacking, the radical rationalization process is most effectively implemented in channel relationships through the relatively persuasive use of the recommendation, warning, and modeling strategies.

A change from the nonextreme negative attitude to a neutral attitude should be sought initially. Then, an attempt to produce a positive attitude can be made.

Finally, the relative importance of the decision to accept a channel program does not appear to influence the importance to the focal organization of facilitating the rationalization processes. Regardless of the channel program's importance, boundary personnel attitude change (in a positive direction) is desirable for the focal organization, as it will increase their commitment to the program and, therefore, its effective implementation. However, it will probably be more difficult to change attitudes for relatively important decisions; attitudes are likely to be more entrenched on important decisions because more ego involvement and cognitive activity is likely to have accompanied their formation (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall 1965).

P9: Irrespective of the importance of the decision on a channel program, once it has been accepted, boundary personnel attitude change is effective in building greater commitment to it and its effective implementation.

P10: Boundary personnel attitude change will be more difficult to achieve on relatively important decisions than on unimportant ones.

Inducement process. After being informed of the program, some boundary personnel may reject it, even though they hold a positive attitude toward its inherent

desirability. This appears largely due to the perceived lack of time, money, personnel, and/or facilities (e.g., shelf space) to implement the program effectively; other similar programs offered by other suppliers (or resellers) may have already been accepted for the time period in question. Some may feel positively toward the outcomes of the program but negatively toward its execution. In such cases, an *inducement process* (cell 4) needs to be facilitated. This refers to minimizing or removing organizational, monetary, time, and place inhibitors that can intervene between the positive attitude and the consequent behavior (Howard and Sheth 1969). *Behavioral change* is the general objective, with movement of boundary personnel from cell 4 to cell 1.

This can be attempted by making it easier for the boundary personnel to accept and implement the program (Webster 1976). Improvements in the focal organization's delivery system, a lessening of bureaucracy, the offer of special assistances (e.g., better credit terms), help (focal organization personnel set up the promotion displays), and advice (on rearrangement of available shelf space) in implementing the program are examples of noneconomic rewards that can effectively promote behavioral change in such circumstances. To supplement such an approach, the positive, normative strategy can be used in implying that a "good and loyal" channel member would participate in such a program based on tradition and channel norms, although it must be used very subtly. Special requests for participation can be used in conjunction with these strategies, especially where a strong personal relationship exists between the parties (Frazier and Summers 1984, Kelman 1961). All of this will help get the message to the boundary personnel of the importance to the focal organization of their participation in the program.³

P11: The inducement process is most effectively implemented in channel relationships through use of the noneconomic reward, positive/normative, and request strategies.

The greater the importance of the decision on a channel program, the easier it will likely be to remove the inhibitors holding boundary personnel with positive attitudes toward the program from accepting it. Therefore, less inducement in the form of noneco-

omic rewards is likely to be needed, compared to attempting to gain acceptance of a relatively unimportant program (from the boundary person's point of view). For example, for a new product with relatively high sales and profit potential, which a boundary person originally hesitantly rejects, only minor adjustments may need to be made in the focal organization's delivery system and bureaucracy, and relatively few assistances and little help may be required in eventually gaining its acceptance.

P12: In cases where boundary personnel originally reject a channel program toward which they have a positive attitude, the greater the importance of the decision, the fewer the inducements that will be required to eventually gain the program's acceptance.

Confrontation processes. Other boundary personnel may reject the program, while holding neutral or negative attitudes toward its inherent desirability (cells 5 and 6 in Table 1). A "confrontation" of sorts will be required in such cases should the focal organization attempt to influence these personnel, as neither their attitudes nor behavior are at a favorable level, unlike the other attitude-behavior conditions discussed thus far.

When boundary personnel reject the program, while holding a neutral or indifferent attitude toward it, a *moderate confrontation process* needs to be facilitated. To promote *behavioral change* and, therefore, movement of boundary personnel to cell 2, the positive normative and request strategies can be used to build the impression that a "good and loyal" channel member would accept the program, and that boundary personnel participation is very important to the focal organization. The negative normative and promise strategies can also be used, if necessary, in a slightly more direct and pressurized approach. The implication would be that only a "poor and disloyal" channel member would not accept the program and that acceptance is expected; however, to promote that acceptance, the focal organization is willing to give a special inducement in the near future, such as more cooperation on product allocations. Promises of noneconomic inducements would be preferable.

P13: Behavioral change in the moderate confrontation process is most effectively achieved through use of the positive/normative, request, negative/normative, and promise strategies.

In attempting to promote *attitude change* in the moderate confrontation process and, therefore, movement of boundary personnel to cell 4, a very persuasive influence approach would need to be undertaken.

³It must be noted that where the strength of the positive attitude is low, and, therefore, boundary personnel lack confidence in their evaluation of the program, this may be the main reason for its rejection. In such cases, the appropriateness of only facilitating the inducement process is in some doubt, as commitment to the program may need to be increased before anything else. Therefore, an attempt to achieve psychological reinforcement may be needed initially, followed, if necessary, by implementation of the inducement process.

The focal organization's personnel would need to stress dramatically the benefits of the program, that it would produce very desirable results for the boundary personnel's firms because of an extremely favorable customer reaction. Furthermore, negative consequences of failing to adopt the program can be emphasized to put pressure on boundary personnel to seriously consider the merits of the program and the opportunity costs their firms would incur should they continue to reject it. Examples of other boundary personnel similar to the ones in question who were solidly behind the program could be given. Dramatic conclusions must be drawn, summarizing the benefits of the program. The indifference boundary personnel hold toward the program must be directly but gently attacked.

- P14: Attitude change in the moderate confrontation process is most effectively achieved through the relatively persuasive use of the recommendation, warning, and modeling strategies.

When boundary personnel attitudes and behavior are consistent, but in a negative direction (cell 6), implementation of a *radical confrontation process* needs to be considered (Bennis et al. 1976). The objective of *behavioral change*, and, therefore, movement of boundary personnel to cell 3, will be relatively difficult to achieve because the personnel must be induced to accept a program they dislike. A relatively direct influence approach involving the use of overt pressure is required. The negative normative strategy could be used in informing boundary personnel what others in the channel will think of anyone who rejects the program. Furthermore, each of the direct mediated strategies are relevant. Personal pleas can be used, implying that personal relations will worsen between the firms should the program continue to be rejected. Promises are appropriate where it is communicated that boundary personnel will receive some inducement in return for their acceptance of the program. Roadblocks can also be set up to discourage continued rejection of the program through use of the threat strategy. This may be particularly appropriate in cases where boundary personnel have had a long history of little or no cooperation on channel programs. While acceptance of the program is voluntary, legalistic references can still be used in arguing that the exchange agreement implies that the boundary personnel should participate in the program. Finally, the noneconomic punishment strategy can be used where the focal organization's personnel become less responsive and cooperative. For example, product deliveries can be delayed, while personal discussions become somewhat cold and businesslike. This approach must be used with some discretion, however, because such nonresponsiveness can also hurt the focal organiza-

tion's goal attainment. Similar to the reasoning behind the avoidance of giving direct economic rewards to achieve behavioral reinforcement, giving direct economic punishments should generally be avoided.

- P15: Behavioral change in the radical confrontation process is most effectively achieved through use of the negative/normative, personal plea, promise, threat, legalistic reference, and noneconomic punishment strategies.

Attitude change in the radical confrontation process will perhaps be even more difficult to achieve than behavioral change. Unlike the radical rationalization process, a relatively conservative influence approach is not recommended here for boundary personnel with strong negative attitudes. Without the leverage of program acceptance, mild positive statements on program benefits and low key examples will probably be screened out, manipulated, and/or ignored and, therefore, be ineffective. Rather, a direct, persuasive attack on negative attitudes is required. The warning strategy is clearly the most appropriate one to use. The negative consequences of failing to adopt the program must be stressed. Adoption of the program must be strongly encouraged, as a result. Small incremental changes in the boundary personnel's negative attitudes are acceptable, with movement to cell 5 eventually desired.

- P16: Attitude change in the radical confrontation process is most effectively achieved through use of the warning strategy.

In cases where negative attitudes toward the program are not changed, the use of warnings can still serve the purpose of establishing a strong position for the focal organization on the desirability of the program. Then, after the program has run its course, if its personnel can present evidence to boundary personnel that the program was indeed a success as predicted, their negative attitudes can be softened, and the chance of their accepting similar programs in the future can improve.⁶

For relatively important decisions, attitude change should be emphasized and sought before any attempt

⁶The "stick" approach just recommended in facilitating behavioral and attitude change in the radical confrontation process is somewhat risky. Where boundary personnel have negative attitudes and have not accepted the program, pressurized measures can merely serve to alienate them and polarize their views. Defense mechanisms can arise causing the psychological confrontation approach to fail. High levels of conflict and low levels of satisfaction can result (Hast and Nevins 1974, Lusch 1976). However, should the focal organization's personnel decide to implement the radical confrontation process, use of other strategies and a more indirect approach appear even less effective.

to facilitate behavioral change is made. As discussed previously, considerable evaluation is likely to accompany such programs (cf. Ray 1982, Rothschild and Gaidis 1981). Convincing boundary personnel that the program will make positive contributions to their firms' goal attainments will be critical in such cases. The risks involved in accepting a weak program, considering the large negative impact to goal attainment that would accompany such a move, will produce a high level of resistance should an attempt at behavioral change be made. After attitudes are changed somewhat, attempts at behavioral change will likely meet with greater success. On the other hand, for relatively unimportant decisions behavioral change can be emphasized as the influence objective. Boundary personnel will not resist attempts at behavioral change as much here, since the risks are less. Overt pressure applied on boundary personnel to change their behavior will meet with more success than an attempt to change their attitudes on the inherent desirability of the program. In cases where boundary personnel do accept the program, then attempts at attitude change can be made through the facilitation of the moderate and radical rationalization processes.

P17: Where the acceptance and implementation of a channel program represents a relatively important decision to boundary personnel, attitude change is a relatively critical objective in facilitating the confrontation processes and should be attempted before behavioral change.

P18: Where the acceptance and implementa-

tion of a channel program represents a relatively unimportant decision to boundary personnel, behavioral change is a relatively critical objective in facilitating the confrontation processes and should be attempted before attitude change.

Summary

This completes the development of the attitude-behavior model exhibited in Table 1. Table 3 summarizes the preceding discussion on the appropriateness of the communication strategies in facilitating the alternative influence processes. A *maybe* prediction is included where use of a strategy is not clearly mandated but also not clearly ruled out.

The major implications of the attitude-behavior framework follow:

1. Channel personnel must explicitly consider the attitude-behavior consistency or inconsistency of target organizations' boundary personnel in order to fully understand the tasks confronting them within their interfirm influence attempts, namely when certain influence processes are appropriate to implement and when certain influence objectives are appropriate to seek. Most certainly, exclusive attention on either the attitudes or the behavior of boundary personnel within target organizations will lead to ineffective and shortsighted influence attempts.
2. Reliance on a single influence approach or communication strategy across each channel

TABLE 3
Appropriateness of the Strategies in Facilitating the Interfirm Influence Processes

	Reinforcement Process		Moderate Rationalization Process		Radical Rationalization Process		Inducement Process		Moderate Confrontation Process		Radical Confrontation Process	
	Behavioral	Psychological	Attitude Change	Attitude Change	Attitude Change	Attitude Change	Behavioral Change	Behavioral Change	Attitude Change	Attitude Change	Behavioral Change	Attitude Change
Information exchange	no	yes	maybe	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Information control	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Modeling	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	no	maybe	maybe
Recommendation	no	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	no	maybe	yes
Warning	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no
Positive normative	yes	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
Negative normative	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	no	no
Economic reward	maybe	no	no	no	maybe	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Noneconomic reward	yes	yes	no	no	yes	maybe	no	no	no	no	no	no
Economic punishment	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	maybe	no	no
Noneconomic punishment	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no
Request	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no
Personal plea	no	no	no	no	no	no	maybe	no	yes	no	no	no
Promise	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	no	no	no
Threat	no	no	no	no	no	no	maybe	no	yes	no	no	no
Legalistic reference	no	no	no	no	no	no	maybe	no	yes	no	no	no

relationship in attempting to achieve the acceptance and implementation of channel programs is clearly inappropriate. While a particular strategy may be effective in facilitating more than one influence process, it will not work well across all of them. Moreover, even where a strategy is appropriate for use in more than one influence process, its orientation and the tactics surrounding its use will change across the processes in question (e.g., use of the recommendation strategy in facilitating the rationalization processes).

3. The importance of the decision on the channel program to target organizations' boundary personnel must also be taken into consideration when designing interfirm influence strategy. Generally, for programs of high importance, attitude reinforcement or change takes precedence as an influence objective, while for programs of low importance, behavioral reinforcement or change is the key.
4. Careful consideration must be given to both the costs and the benefits of facilitating each influence process. It is obvious that the facilitation of some processes will be more costly than others (e.g., the radical confrontation process). For certain channel programs, the focal organization can be better off implementing only a portion of the influence processes exhibited in Table 1, a definite segmentation approach.

Future Research Needs

A variety of research needs are suggested within this article. The most obvious one is for channel researchers to examine empirically the propositions dealing with communication strategies and the importance of the decision on the channel program within both laboratory and field settings. Clearly, none of the propositions stated can be accepted at face value at this time. A study is also needed to verify the validity of the strategy categorization in Table 2. The strategies discussed here certainly do not represent an exhaustive set; other strategies and categories of relevance must be identified.

The conceptual framework in this article is focused on processes and mechanisms of influence and must be broadened to include other constructs of relevance to exchange relationships. Such factors as the power of each party to the exchange, the personal characteristics of the personnel involved in the influence attempts (e.g., prestige, credibility), boundary personnel attributions of their reasons for accepting or rejecting programs, boundary personnel interpretations of the communication strategies used by the focal organization's personnel (e.g., a recommendation

strategy is interpreted as a threat), the "judged influence of extraneous events" (Sternthal and Craig 1982), and the environmental structure surrounding the exchange (nature of competition, state of the economy) must be eventually linked to this framework.

Additional models must be developed that extend the model developed herein, identifying other processes of relevance within distribution channel relationships. For example, the model in Table 1 is limited to programs where channel member participation is voluntary and where the behavioral alternatives are dichotomous. Clearly, the performance of many behaviors in a channel relationship is involuntary (as long as the exchange relationship exists) with behavioral alternatives varying from minimum, to average, to above average commitment. Examples of such behaviors include retailer or wholesaler local advertising expenditures, inventory levels, and parts and supply purchases. Extended attitude-behavior models must be developed to deal with this.

Conclusion

The objective of this article was to develop a normative conceptual framework to promote the effectiveness of influence attempts between organizations in ongoing channel relationships. A model was developed based on the underlying concept of attitude-behavior consistency or inconsistency. It is the first in the marketing channels literature to predict when certain influence processes are appropriate to implement and when certain influence objectives are appropriate to seek in distribution channel relationships. Propositions were developed linking the model to alternative communication strategies and the importance of the decision on the channel program. This article should (1) aid distribution channel personnel in effectively managing and coordinating ongoing exchange relationships, and (2) stimulate additional research, especially empirical research, to examine its propositions in the laboratory and a variety of channel contexts. Undoubtedly, additional effort is needed in developing extended attitude-behavior frameworks to facilitate our understanding of ways to promote the effective maintenance and coordination of ongoing channel relationships.

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