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The Application of Persuasion Research to Consultation in School Psychology

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Consultation in school psychology has been widely recognized to be an interpersonal influence process. The research literature on factors influencing persuasive effects offers a potential resource for addressing social-influence problems faced by consultants. This article discusses some guidelines for effective persuasion derived from this research, and illustrates their application to problems of consultation. The discussion is focused on three broad tasks that a persuader faces: the task of identifying the potential bases of resistance, the task of constructing effective messages aimed at such bases, and the task of following up after the initial persuasive effort. For each of these tasks, the existing literature on persuasive effects suggests general principles concerning effective persuasion. © 1997 Society for the Study of School Psychology

The general purpose of this article is to present some potentially useful principles concerning the construction of effective persuasive messages in the school psychology context, as guided by the accumulated research evidence concerning persuasion. In particular, this article is focused on applications to school psychology consultation since, of all the major activities of school psychologists, consultation has most often been viewed as an interpersonal influence process; this is seen most noticeably in the writings of Erchul (Erchul, 1993; Erchul & Chewning, 1990) and Hughes (1983, 1992), and also in articles by Martin (1978, 1983), and Short, Moore, and Williams (1991). Our intention is not to survey all of the existing literature on persuasive effects, or to address all the multifaceted problems of social influence in school psychology consultation, or to give a completely nuanced treatment of every particular; our aim is simply to extract some broad guidelines for effective persuasion from the research

literature on persuasion, and to illustrate their application to problems of consultation in school psychology.

CONSULTATION IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

To deliver effective psychological services to the greatest number of students, school psychologists use consultation intervention techniques (Zins, Kratochwill, & Elliott, 1993). These techniques all are characterized by various degrees of collaboration, communication, and problem-solving between the school psychology consultant and the school-based consultee. When that consultee is a teacher (as compared to an administrator, a parent, a community-based professional, or someone else responsible for the child's welfare), particular issues may be salient because the psychologist–teacher relationship tends to be a coordinate one rather than a supervisory one. Further, since the teacher is the one in direct contact with the child and family, consultation is delivered, in a sense, through the teacher as intermediary. Consequently, the nature of the consultation relationship and its impact on the consultee determine whether the recommended services are in fact delivered. "Regardless of how accurately a psychologist might diagnose a child's psychoeducational needs and how skillfully he or she might match those needs to treatment recommendations for that child, no psychological services will actually be delivered to that child unless consultees take action" (Gutkin & Curtis, 1990, p. 578).

Given that consultation involves close communication and interpersonal exchanges, social influence processes are intrinsically important. Even in situations where the consultant has no predetermined ground to cover and is merely reacting to the descriptions of the consultee's work problems, there is the expectation that the consultant will attempt to guide or structure the social exchange in ways consistent with theory and practice regarding how consultation should best proceed (Caplan & Caplan, 1993). For example, persuasion may be involved when one limits the consultee from digressing from the topic, from discussing nonwork-related problems, or when one tries to increase consultee objectivity. It may be used to move the conversation to discussions of consultee skill, knowledge, or confidence deficits. Or persuasion may be involved simply in trying to convince the consultee that consultation is more appropriate and potentially effective than some other means of dealing with the problem such as referral to another party. Thus, the role of persuasion in consultation should not be viewed as necessarily controlling, directive, or, at worst, manipulative. Rather, persuasion in consultation is quite compatible with the view of consultation as a coordinate, nonhierarchical, cooperative venture (Brown, 1993; Henning-Stout, 1993). Viewed in this broader sense, persuasion in consultation is a tool to aid both problem-solving and relationship building, and thus should raise few distinctive ethical concerns.

Many of this paper's examples focus on issues involved in persuading consultees to adopt a particular course of action. Persuasion is useful in situations in which a school psychologist advances a plan that a teacher is required to implement but questions. This may occur even when the psychologist offers the plan as tentative, in a low-key manner, and when the plan can be considered quite feasible (Phillips & McCullough, 1990). In situations involving lack of action and active resistance (cf. Wickstrom & Witt, 1993), persuasion may be invaluable. Further, such resistance should not imply that the teacher views the consultant's plan as unworkable; rather, the teacher may have his or her own ideas about problem resolution. This is important to recognize in light of research showing that teachers who frequently engage in consultation tend to consider themselves to be good problem solvers (Stenger, Tollefson, & Fine, 1992).

This last point clearly implies that consultants should not automatically assume that consultee resistance is something to be overcome by persuasive techniques. A consultee's objections to a proposal might be quite legitimate, objections that should lead a consultant to modify or abandon the original recommendations. As Wickstrom and Witt (1993) point out, "It would be a mistake ... to assume that resistance to change is a negative or inappropriate response to a request for change." Resistance can be "an intelligent response to proposed changes that may or may not benefit the help seeker in desired ways" (p. 159). Consultants will want to thoughtfully consider the consultee's objections before concluding that persuasion to change a consultee's current plan is needed. Yet, there still may be persuasion involved as various steps of the plan are implemented and evaluated.

RESEARCH ON PERSUASION

Dependable generalizations about persuasive message effects have proved rather more elusive than one might suppose. There have been several barriers to the development of dependable generalizations in this research area.

One is the prevalence of single-message research designs. In the standard experimental study of persuasive effects, each general category (level) of a message variable is represented by a single message. So, for instance, one particular example of a high-fear-appeal message might be compared to a single example of a low-fear-appeal message. But it has become apparent that such single-message designs afford a poor basis for generalizations about persuasive effects. Such designs suffer because manipulating the message variable of interest inevitably means simultaneously manipulating other variables that are not of interest (e.g., a particular way of manipulating the fear level might also make for unwanted accompanying variations in the message's plausibility); moreover, such designs ignore the very real possibility that the effects of a given variable may not be uniform across different messages. (For further discussion, see Jackson, 1992, pp.

25–49; Jackson, O'Keefe, & Jacobs, 1988; Jackson, O'Keefe, Jacobs, & Brashers, 1989; O'Keefe, 1990, pp. 121–126).

A second barrier to the development of dependable generalizations is the dispersion of the relevant literature across a number of academic fields. One can find relevant research reports in psychology, communication, advertising, public health, management, sociology, political science, medicine, education, economics, and on and on. Indeed, virtually any field in which experimental social-scientific methods are used is likely to contain some work relevant to persuasion; the process of persuasion is itself ubiquitous, and hence investigators in diverse fields come to have an interest in persuasive phenomena. But as a result, the relevant research can be difficult to locate. Indeed, many discussions of this research area suffer from being based on only a limited portion of the relevant literature. This is a problem both for the persuasion researcher (in social psychology, communication, or other fields) and for the school psychology trainer interested in acquainting students with the implications of persuasion for consultation and other areas.

A third barrier–but one that is being reduced–has been a reliance on inadequate methods of literature review. As in so many research areas, vote-counting literature reviews have predominated, with an attendant over-emphasis on statistical significance. The application of meta-analytic procedures to persuasion research obviously offers prospects for improvement here. (For a general discussion of meta-analysis in persuasion research, see O'Keefe, 1991; for examples, see Allen, 1991; Boster & Mongeau, 1984; Buller, 1986; Dillard, Hunter, & Burgoon, 1984; Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Sutton, 1982).

Even given all these barriers, however, it is too pessimistic to conclude that there are no useful generalizations to be obtained from this research literature. To be sure, if one seeks sure-fire, never-fail, exceptionless guides to persuasive message construction, then one seeks the holy grail. But the existing literature on persuasive effects provides a basis for offering a number of general principles and guidelines concerning effective persuasion. In the section that follows, we identify and discuss several such principles.

PRINCIPLES AND APPLICATIONS

Our discussion of research-based guidelines for effective persuasion is organized around three broad tasks that a persuader faces: the task of identifying the potential bases of resistance, the task of constructing effective messages aimed at such bases, and the task of following up after the initial persuasive efforts.

Diagnosing the Bases of Resistance

Resistance has been defined as "anything that impedes problem solving or plan implementation and ultimately problem resolution" (Wickstrom & Witt, 1993, p. 160). Although our discussion will be limited to resistance associated with the consultee–rather than the consultant, client's family, or broader social system–the sources of resistance are often complex and multifaceted (Gutkin & Hickman, 1990). Overcoming resistance from another individual requires an accurate diagnosis of its bases–and the literature on persuasive communication suggests that there are two possible mistakes to be guarded against here. One is the mistake of assuming attitude change is needed when it is not; the other is the mistake of assuming the basis of attitude is known when it is not.

Assuming Attitude Change is Needed.   The first mistake is that of assuming that what lies behind a person's not doing X is an unwillingness to do X (or an opposition to doing X)–that is, assuming that a negative attitude (toward the proposed action) is the root of the problem, and hence that attitude change is called for. To be sure, the primary focus of much persuasion research has been precisely on understanding processes of attitude change. But, as has become clear, sometimes the root of resistance lies somewhere other than attitude. Here we briefly discuss three other possibilities.

First: the problem might be not seeing the *relevance* of an existing attitude to the desired behavior. That is, the desired attitudes might be in place, but the receiver fails to see the connection between the attitude and the behavior. In such a circumstance, the persuader's task is not to change attitudes, but to get the receiver to see the relevance of the existing attitude to the behavior of interest, so as to act consistently with the existing attitude. For example, school personnel who express positive attitudes toward complete racial and ethnic integration may need to be shown that such attitudes are relevant to whether they recommend for special education primarily children from a particular ethnic or SES group, and to whether they group by ability, and to whether they employ cooperative learning techniques (Slavin, 1983) in their classes; for such personnel, the necessary attitude already exists, but the connection to behavior needs to be emphasized. (For a general discussion of such circumstances, see Snyder, 1982.)

Several studies have demonstrated that interventions that enhance attitudinal relevance can produce greater attitude-behavior consistency. For example, Snyder and Kendzierski (1982, Investigation 2) studied undergraduates known to have favorable attitudes about psychological research; these participants were asked to volunteer for extra sessions of an experiment. This request was unusually demanding (at inconvenient times,

etc.)–to the point that, despite having positive attitudes, only 25% of those in the control condition volunteered.

Before responding to the request, each participant overheard a conversation between two other students (who were confederates) discussing the request. One said "I don't know if I should volunteer or if I shouldn't volunteer. What do you think?" In the control condition, the other responded "Beats me–it's up to you." In the experimental condition, the response was "Well, I guess that whether you do or whether you don't is really a question of how worthwhile you think experiments are." This experimental treatment was designed to heighten the relevance of the existing positive attitudes to the behavior being requested–and produced a 60% volunteering rate.

Such results suggest that sometimes persons may not see certain existing attitudes as relevant to their decision making, and hence those attitudes may not have much influence. The persuader's task thus may be simply to remind persons of their attitudes, and to help them see the connection between those attitudes and the behavioral choices they are facing.

To be able to identify inconsistencies between attitudes and behavior, a consultant will need to know teachers' attitudes, and this can be problematic. Vernberg and Medway (1981) studied the attributions of teachers and parents who were involved in discussions about child behavior. Participants' own attributions were measured, and each was asked to recall what they took to be the attributions of the other party (that is, teacher's recollections of parents' attributions, and vice versa). Teachers' recollections were accurate, but parents' were not. These results suggest that teachers may not readily share (at least with parents) their attributions about child behavior when those attributions involve blaming the child or family for the problem. Similarly, these attributions and attitudes may not be readily shared with consultants. And even if consultants do build open and trusting relationships with consultees (Caplan & Caplan, 1993), the urgency to define, analyze, and solve the client's problem may limit consultants' familiarity with consultee attitudes.

Still, consultants who encounter resistance should not automatically assume that consultees lack the desired attitudes. Consultants will want to be alert to the possibility that the consultee may already have the necessary attitudes in place, but simply fails to see a connection between the attitude and the behavior sought by the consultant. This is one way in which resistance might be rooted in something other than attitude (specifically, rooted in a failure to see the relevance of an attitude to an action).

Second: the resistance might be based in normative, not attitudinal, considerations. A number of generalized models of intentional behavior recognize that both attitudinal (personal) and normative (social) factors can (directly or indirectly) influence conduct. Thus even when the con-

sultee has the desired attitudes, perceived normative pressures might prevent the consultee from engaging in the desired action.

The best-known model that incorporates both attitudinal and normative influences on intentional conduct is Fishbein and Ajzen's (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) theory of reasoned action (for reviews and discussion, see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, pp. 168–186; O'Keefe, 1990, pp. 79–94; Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988). The theory of reasoned action is based on the idea that the primary determinant of a person's (volitional) conduct is that person's behavioral intention (what the person intends to do). Behavioral intentions, in turn, are seen to be a function of two factors: the person's attitude toward the behavior in question, and the person's "subjective norm," which represents the person's general perception of whether important others desire the performance of the behavior. These two factors may not have equal influence on a given intention, so the theory acknowledges that these factors may have varying "weights." This is expressed algebraically in the following formula.

$$BI = (A_B)w_1 + (SN)w_2$$

where BI represents behavioral intention, A_B represents the attitude toward the behavior, SN represents subjective norm, and w_1 and w_2 are weighting factors.

As this perspective makes clear, an individual may have a positive attitude toward the recommended behavior, but perceived normative pressures can override that attitude. Plainly, in such a circumstance, the appropriate persuasive target is not the attitude, but the normative considerations.

There are a variety of ways in which an individual's normative perceptions might be influenced. One particularly straightforward means is that of having normatively significant persons be involved (directly or indirectly) in the influence efforts. For example, significant reductions in high-risk HIV/AIDS behavior have been observed following an intervention in which locally popular "trendsetters" communicated risk-reduction recommendations and information to friends (Kelly et al., 1992). Although there are many potential explanations for these effects, one obvious possibility is that the participation of these normatively significant individuals helped to influence perceptions of what was normatively desirable, thereby producing corresponding changes in behavior.

Consider, from this vantage point, the problem of encouraging the use of consultation services. It is clear that if consultation is to succeed there needs to be a normative and widespread acceptance of the practice by teachers and administrators. Unfortunately, consultation and other forms of indirect service continue to be less in demand than referral, assessment, and direct service activities (Fagan & Wise, 1994). Consultation tends to be sought out most by teachers with the least experience, and not sought out by teachers with the highest self-efficacy (Hughes, Grossman, & Barker,

1990). Yet it is just these latter teachers and those with the most teaching experience who probably define the normative standard in schools. Accordingly, the theory of reasoned action suggests that it is not enough for consultants to work only with receptive consultees and those who seek them out. The model suggests that teachers who do not seek consultation services (even if those teachers are not in any way negative toward consultation) may impede, by their standard-setting, the willingness of other staff to contact the consultant (even if that other staff has positive personal attitudes toward using consultation services). This illustrates a second way in which the basis of resistance might lie outside attitude (specifically, might lie in normative considerations).

Third: the source of difficulty might be a perceived inability to perform the desired behavior. Several recent theoretical perspectives on intentional behavior have emphasized the potential contribution of concepts such as perceived behavioral control and self-efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1991). A convenient example for our purposes is Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (for a general review, see Ajzen, 1991). The theory of planned behavior represents an elaboration of the theory of reasoned action, by adding perceived behavioral control as a third predictor of behavioral intention. Perceived behavioral control refers to one's confidence in one's ability to perform a given behavior, one's perceived self-efficacy with respect to a given behavior. The algebraic expression of the theory of planned behavior is:

$$BI = (A_B)w_1 + (SN)w_2 + (PBC)w_3$$

where *PBC* refers to perceived behavioral control, and w_3 is the corresponding weighting factor.

What this perspective suggests is that sometimes persuaders will need to focus their attentions on the receiver's perceived ability to perform the desired behavior (self-efficacy, perceived behavioral control). An individual might have a positive attitude toward performing the behavior, and might believe that significant others want the person to perform the behavior, but still might not intend to perform the behavior—because the person doubts his or her capabilities with respect to performing the behavior.

It may be important to notice here a distinction between (what might be called) generalized self-efficacy (e.g., general locus of control) and behavior-specific self-efficacy. In the case of teachers, for example, this is the distinction between the teacher's general teaching self-efficacy (having confidence in one's teaching abilities, etc.) and the teacher's specific belief in his or her self-efficacy with respect to some particular behavior/intervention/treatment (believing oneself to be capable of doing X). The theory of planned behavior (like related theories) is focused on behavior-specific self-efficacy.

The greatest likely impact on specific self-efficacy perceptions probably results from the person's having already successfully performed the behav-

ior; successful performance will naturally enhance one's belief in one's capabilities. But enhanced self-efficacy can also come about through observing models (that is, seeing the successful performance of others) or through appropriate encouragement (e.g., having a believable communicator express confidence in one's capabilities). For example, Eden and Kinnar (1991) found that modelling and verbal encouragement could increase perceived self-efficacy and thereby increase volunteering for special-forces service among prospective military personnel; Gist, Schwoerer, and Rosen (1989) observed that a combination of modelling and imitation yielded significant gains in computer software self-efficacy (and corresponding better performance); Maibach and Flora (1993) observed similar effects for modelling-and-rehearsal on AIDS prevention self-efficacy. Similarly, Gutkin and Hickman (1988) reported that teachers' perceptions of control over a common classroom problem could be significantly affected by providing relevant information about the degree of control–and an increasing perception of control was associated with an increasing preference for consultation over referral services.

Thus simply providing instructions (e.g., about a recommended intervention) may not be sufficient to produce the desired behavior, even if positive attitudes toward the behavior exist. For instance, in trying to discourage children's use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco, it is apparently insufficient to simply tell children to "Just Say No." Indeed, there is good evidence that one needs also to provide specific training in refusal skills (e.g., Jones, McDonald, Fiore, Arrington, & Randall, 1990; Reardon, Sussman, & Flay, 1989; Turner et al., 1993).

Historically, the consultation literature has recognized the importance of such training. All the major consultation models address improving consultee skills, and the behavioral and social-learning models tend to emphasize modeling, rehearsal, and generalization (Brown, Pryzwansky, & Schulte, 1991). More broadly, a consultant may need to attempt to extend the consultee's range of perceived capabilities in order to encourage the consultee's seeking consultation. Gutkin and Ajchenbaum (1984; see also Gutkin & Hickman, 1988) reported that when teachers think they have control concerning a specific student problem, they are more likely to indicate a high likelihood of choosing consultation services (as opposed to, for example, referral). What this suggests is that sometimes teachers may not approach a consultant–even though consultation might in fact be useful–precisely because the teachers do not perceive themselves to have the necessary behavioral control (but for some complexities here, see the discussion of Hughes, 1992, pp. 282–284). To pave the way for subsequent consultation, then, a consultant may need initially to enhance the consultee's self-efficacy beliefs.

In sum, one mistake in diagnosing the bases of resistance to influence is the assumption that negative attitudes lie behind the resistance, and hence

that successful influence will require changing those attitudes. Sometimes, of course, attitude change will be the appropriate goal. But sometimes despite the appropriate attitudes being in place, the desired behavior is not forthcoming–because the relevance of the attitude to the behavior is not noticed, because there are countervailing normative pressures, or because there is a perceived inability to perform the behavior. In such circumstances, persuaders need to focus attention on the appropriate persuasive targets if they are to be successful.

Assuming the Basis of Attitude is Known.   Even where a negative attitude is the problem, a second misdiagnosis of resistance can occur: assuming that one knows what the basis of that attitude is (and hence what underlying beliefs need to be addressed). A given negative attitude might have very different substantive bases, and it will be important in any given case to determine–not merely assume–just what lies behind the attitude.

A simple example outside school psychology may help to make this point more clear. Consider the problem of persuading people to wear protective headgear when they engage in certain leisure activities (bicycling, horseback riding, and the like). One might naturally suppose that this problem will require similar solutions across the various contexts in which it appears; that is, persuading people to wear such headgear will pretty much involve the same sorts of considerations across the different leisure activities. But in fact it turns out that participants in these different activities have different bases for negative attitudes toward wearing protective headgear. There is good evidence that many bicyclists are not aware of the importance of protective helmets; by contrast, many equestrians recognize the need for helmets but resist because of beliefs about how hot, heavy, and uncomfortable helmets are (Condie, Rivara, & Bergman, 1993; DiGuiseppi, Rivara, & Koepsell, 1990). Naturally, then, different persuasive messages will be required in these two cases.

The general point is this: Since the same attitude can have very different bases, successful persuasive messages will be those that attack the relevant underlying bases of the attitude in the audience addressed. To assume, rather than to verify, the bases of existing attitudes invites persuasive efforts that are poorly adapted to their audiences. There is (perhaps unsurprisingly) research evidence indicating that where persuasive messages are appropriately matched to the underlying bases of attitude, those messages are correspondingly more effective (Shavitt, 1990, 1992).

Summary.   This section has discussed two possible mistakes connected with diagnosing the bases of consultee resistance–assuming attitude change is needed when it is not, and assuming the basis of attitude is known when it is not. Both mistakes can stem from overweening confidence on the consultant's part, from the consultant's presuming a better

understanding of the consultee's situation than is actually had. We empha-
size this, because a focus on effective persuasion by consultants can some-
times evoke an image of consultation as involving "domination rather than
collaboration" (Henning-Stout, 1993, p. 37). In fact, however, as we have
emphasized and illustrated, effective persuasion requires a sympathetic
and accurate understanding of the consultee's circumstance.

Constructing Effective Messages

Given some initial diagnosis of the potential bases of resistance, a per-
suader will be in a good position to construct social influence efforts that
are well-adapted to the particular obstacles at hand. The research literature
on persuasion yields a number of recommendations concerning the effec-
tive construction of such messages. Here we discuss a sampling of relevant
considerations. (For further discussion, see O'Keefe, 1990, pp. 158–174;
Perloff, 1993, pp. 156–185.)

Message Clarity and Specificity.   There are numerous reasons why con-
sultants are less clear, less direct, or more often misinterpreted than they
otherwise might be. Sometimes a consultant may not realize the impor-
tance of spelling out just what is being suggested, the importance of using
intermittent summaries, and the need to validate what the consultee heard
(Kratochwill & Bergan, 1990). Clarity may vary as a result of jargon (Hyatt
& Tingstrom, 1993) or technical terms (Rhoades & Kratochwill, 1992).
Specificity may vary depending upon the degree to which the consultant
follows a behavioral consultation framework (Medway & Forman, 1980;
Rhoades & Kratochwill, 1992). When making recommendations that the
consultant thinks will encounter resistance, consultants may naturally be
tempted to hedge, to be indirect, to be roundabout, and to be ambiguous;
consultants are surely not immune to the general reluctance to deliver
messages that are thought likely to produce negative reactions (e.g., Rosen
& Tesser, 1970).

But there are two lines of persuasion research that emphasize the
importance of clear and direct communications. The first is research
comparing the effectiveness of messages with explicit conclusions and
recommendations as opposed to messages in which these elements are
omitted or left implicit. Generally speaking, messages with explicit conclu-
sions and recommendations have been found to be more persuasive than
those without such message elements (Biddle, 1966; Cope & Richardson,
1972; Feingold & Knapp, 1977; Fine, 1957; Hovland & Mandell, 1952;
Kardes, 1988; Leventhal, Watts, & Pagano, 1967; Tanner, Day, & Crask,
1989; Tubbs, 1968; Weiss & Steenbock, 1965).

The second line of research is connected with social judgment theory
(Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965; Sherif & Hovland, 1961; a classic review

is that of Kiesler, Collins, & Miller, 1969, pp. 238–301; for other discussions, see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, pp. 362–382; O'Keefe, 1990, pp. 29–44). According to social judgment theory, successful persuasion depends cen- trally on what position the receiver perceives the communicator to be advocating; some advocated positions will receive a favorable reception, others a less favorable reaction. But the perceived position of a message is subject to perceptual distortions, known as assimilation and contrast ef- fects. An assimilation effect is said to occur when a message is perceived to advocate a position closer to that of the receiver than it actually does; a contrast effect is said to occur when the message is perceived as advocating a position more discrepant from the receiver's than it actually does.

Both assimilation and contrast effects reduce the effectiveness of persuasive messages. A contrast effect does so by making the communicator's position appear so extreme as to be unworthy of belief; an assimilation effect does so by minimizing the apparent amount of change a receiver must produce in order to (seemingly) be in agreement with the communicator.

It appears, however, that messages that clearly state the communicator's views minimize assimilation and contrast effects. Only relatively ambiguous communications are likely to be subject to assimilation and contrast effects (see Granberg & Campbell, 1977; Sherif et al., 1965, p. 153; Sherif & Hovland, 1961, p. 153). Messages that are clear, explicit, and direct are thus likely to enjoy relatively greater persuasive success, precisely because they reduce the possibility of these perceptual distortions.

The importance of such clarity and directness in communication is also underscored by several otherwise diverse bits of research concerned with consultation specifically. For example, Medway and Forman (1980) re- ported that teachers prefer behavioral consultation to mental health con- sultation. "Teachers responded particularly favorably to the behavioral consultant's acceptance of a directive and supervisory role ... [and] were most impressed with the consultant's specificity, directiveness, questioning, and use of behavioral principles" (p. 346). It may be that this preference for behavioral presentations was based, at least in part, on the greater directness and clarity of the communicator's recommendations. A more recent study by Hyatt and Tingstrom (1993) also showed that, under certain circumstances, certain behavioral interventions are rated as more acceptable when presented using behavioral language or jargon.

There are several additional strands of evidence that corroborate the importance of clear and direct consultant communications. For instance, Gutkin and Curtis's (1990) review, in identifying a set of problem-solving steps for consultants to consider, describes the specification of consultee and consultant responsibilities as "a crucial step that is often overlooked. Unless the issues inherent in this step are overtly discussed, the planned intervention may 'fall between the cracks'" (p. 593). Indeed, they cite evidence that "providing explicit instructions to consultees for carrying

out treatment plans is one of the methods most frequently cited by school-based consultants as leading to treatment implementation by consultees" (p. 593). And Hughes (1992, p. 286) discusses research indicating that at least for some consultants (but perhaps not all; see Hughes & DeForest, 1993), using certain structuring techniques (including offering specific suggestions about the problem) will enhance consultant effectiveness.

In sum, there is extensive evidence from the persuasion effects literature, and some consistent evidence concerning consultation specifically, indicating the greater persuasive effectiveness of messages containing clear, direct, and specific recommendations and conclusions.

Handling Objections. Sometimes a consultee may have objections (whether voiced or unvoiced) to what the consultant proposes. How might such possible counterarguments be handled effectively? One line of persuasion effects research has compared different means of handling opposing arguments. In this research, the fundamental experimental contrast is between messages that discuss only supporting arguments (commonly called "one-sided messages") and messages that discuss both supporting and opposing arguments ("two-sided messages"). But there are (at least) two different ways of constructing a two-sided message: in discussing the opposing arguments, the two-sided message might try to refute (attack, undermine) those arguments (a "refutational" two-sided message), or it might simply mention the opposing arguments without directly attacking them (a "nonrefutational" two-sided message).

Generally speaking, refutational two-sided messages have been found to enjoy a larger persuasive advantage over one-sided messages than do nonrefutational two-sided messages. (For reviews and discussion, see Allen, 1991; O'Keefe, 1990, pp. 161–163; O'Keefe, 1993.) What this suggests is that, insofar as possible, persuaders should try to straightforwardly attack potential objections. Explicit refutation of opposing arguments has been found generally to be more persuasive than simply acknowledging (or ignoring) such arguments.

This direct handling of possible objections should not be thought to be inconsistent with the development and maintenance of a collaborative relationship between consultant and consultee. Indeed, the very best sort of collaborative relationship might be one in which relevant considerations can be put up for frank discussion, one in which consultees feel free to express concerns and doubts–and consultants feel free to address those concerns and doubts directly. Such open discussion may be more easily accomplished at particular stages of consultation. In the plan analysis stage of behavioral consultation, for example, baseline data collected by the teacher is reviewed to further assess the nature of the problem and its environmental determinants; with such data in hand, it may be easier to have these frank discussions than at other times. Similar key junctures for

candid talk can be found when a mental health model of consultation is used. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, consultants should not automatically undertake to refute every objection a consultee raises. Consultees may have well thought out reservations about a proposed course of action, and consultants will want to have carefully considered the merit of consultees' objections before engaging in refutation.

The Powerfulness of Examples.   When conveying information to consultees–for instance, about the likely effects of a particular intervention–a consultant may have the choice of two different forms of presentation. On the one hand, one might provide a statistical summary, which gives a quantitative summary of a large number of cases (perhaps using means, percentages, and the like); on the other hand, one might just present a single example (a case study), which describes a particular instance in detail. Since the example provides only one supporting instance, and the statistical summary is based on many supporting cases, one might think that the statistical summary would naturally be more persuasive. In fact, however, the persuasion effects literature reveals just the opposite: examples or case histories are more persuasive than statistical-summary information (for a general review, see Taylor & Thompson, 1982).

For instance, Koballa (1986) provided preservice high school teachers with information favorable to a particular science curriculum. In one condition the information was presented as the report of a single teacher who had used the curriculum; the teacher discussed various positive effects of the curriculum (how much more interested students were, how much more they learned, and so forth). In the other condition, the information was presented as a statistical summary of the findings of about a dozen different uses of the curriculum, but the identical points were made (how much more interested students were, how much more they learned, etc.). The single example proved to be much more persuasive than the statistical summary report, and indeed to produce effects that were more stable over time (less susceptible to decay).

The use of examples, rather than statistical summaries, can obviously find many applications in consultation practice. But one notable application is the use of "parables" in Caplan's (1970) approach to mental health consultation. A parable is a technique used to reduce theme interference. Theme interference involves the consultee displacing some of his or her underlying conflicts onto the client's situation, thus distorting the chances that the client's problem(s) can be solved successfully through consultation. The consultee views himself or herself as invariably suffering because of some condition; he or she sees the client as having the same condition, and thus the client too is doomed to suffer. The parable is essentially an anecdotal case constructed by the consultant from the details of the consultation case and presented to the consultee as an illustration of an

instance in which the particular condition did not inevitably lead to a negative end. Using such parables might be particularly valuable when consultees are so emotionally invested in a situation that attitude change is difficult. But even in circumstances that are not so involving, examples appear to have greater persuasive effect than quantitative information.

Following Up

Once persuasion appears to have been accomplished, the unwary persuader will think the job is finished. But in fact, persuaders very often need to engage in follow-up persuasion. Researchers have identified two different bases of the need for such continuing persuasive efforts: the phenomenon of regret following choice, and the general observation that persuasive effects tend to dissipate over time.

Regret Following Choice.   In the short term, the necessity for follow-up persuasive efforts can arise from the phenomenon of regret following choice [a phenomenon derived from Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory]. From the point of view of dissonance theory, virtually every choice or decision creates some dissonance, because there are inevitably some undesirable aspects of the chosen alternative and some desirable aspects of the unchosen alternative. Hence, following a choice, persons are expected to (and indeed commonly do) exhibit dissonance reduction, primarily through evaluating the chosen alternative more positively and the unchosen alternative less positively.

But intervening between the choice and dissonance reduction can be a period of "regret," during which the person temporarily evaluates the unchosen alternative *more* positively, and the chosen alternative *less* positively (see Festinger & Walster, 1964; Walster, 1964). It is entirely possible that the initial evaluations become reversed, such that the initially unchosen alternative becomes more desirable than the chosen option–which can lead the person to try to back out of the original choice.

The occurrence of this "regret" phase following a decision is thus an indication that a persuader's job is not finished when the initial decision has been made. On the contrary, a persuader may need to produce continuing support and reassurance for the decision, lest the persuadee reverse the initial decision.

An empirical demonstration of the importance of such follow-up persuasive efforts was provided by Donnelly and Ivancevich's (1970) study of automobile purchases. During the time interval between the purchase decision and delivery of the vehicle, some purchasers back out of their initial decision. But Donnelly and Ivancevich found that making two follow-up telephone calls to the buyer–calls that emphasized the desirable aspects of the chosen automobile and that reassured the buyer of the wisdom of the decision–significantly

reduced the number of purchasers who reversed their initial decisions. As mentioned earlier, it is known that direct service activities (such as referral) are used more frequently in schools than indirect services (such as consultation). What is not known, however, is how many teachers are initially inclined to seek consultation but then change their minds somewhere during the consultation process and end up referring the child. This is an interesting question for future research.

The Decay of Persuasive Effects. In the long term, the necessity for follow-up efforts arises simply because persuasive effects tend to dissipate as time passes (for a general review, see Cook & Flay, 1978). Sometimes effects are relatively long-lasting, and sometimes they evaporate almost instantly, but in any case persuasive effects are likely to diminish over time. Familiar old habits and procedures can reemerge; other (competing) persuasive messages may be received; countervailing obstacles and constraints may appear.

For example, "ideas that sound simple during the course of consultation may, in fact, require skills that the consultee does not possess to an adequate degree"–and this may not become apparent until the consultee is "actually attempting to implement the strategy in question" (Gutkin & Curtis, 1990, p. 584). In the face of these obstacles, the consultee's initial commitment to the intervention may well diminish–and only follow-up effort by the consultant will identify and address this problem.

Sometimes the only follow-up effort that may be needed is a simple reminder or prompt from the consultant. There is an extensive research literature documenting the potential importance of prompts and reminders as influences on behavior; prompts and reminders have been found to significantly increase appropriate conduct concerning participation in campus counseling programs (Trice & Haire, 1988), recycling (Spaccarelli, Zolik, & Jason, 1989), blood donation (Lipsitz, Kallmeyer, Ferguson, & Abas, 1989), and breast self-examination (Craun & Deffenbacher, 1987). Notably, these effects seem to involve circumstances in which the relevant attitudes are already in place (e.g., positive attitudes toward recycling); the prompt/reminder appears to function to engage the already-existing attitude. Prompting may not be so effective if the necessary attitudes do not exist.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of research findings in persuasion that appear to have some potential utility for addressing problems of consultation in school psychology. Our discussion here has necessarily been brief, and thus various complexities have been bypassed.

In particular, it should be noticed that the various considerations mentioned here are not independent of one another, but interpenetrate. For

example, programs attempting to develop drug-resistance among children have been found to profit from booster interventions, because the effects decay over time (Botvin, Renick, & Baker, 1983). One might well suppose that, in a similar vein, consultant efforts at boosting consultee self-efficacy may need similar follow-up efforts. As another example, when trying to influence consultees' normative perceptions, it may be more useful to mention specific people or instances, rather than quantitative information about norms, just because of the generally greater impact of examples over statistics. Notably, the HIV/AIDS intervention discussed above (Kelly et al., 1992) used specific "trend-setter" individuals to implement the norm-altering intervention. The general point is that the various ideas discussed here do not operate independently, but are very much interrelated.

Finally, it should be remembered that the present paper offers only a sampling of findings from the persuasion effects research literature. Our aim has been simply to sketch some research-based guidelines for effective persuasion, and to illustrate their application to problems of school-psychology consultation. A critical issue for school psychologists will be staying relatively current with this literature and the social-psychological literature generally. This will necessitate accessing the important summary reviews (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; O'Keefe, 1990) and outlets (e.g., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* series, the annual *Communication Yearbook*) and urging the major professional organizations, NASP and APA, to sponsor continuing education in this area. It also will necessitate dialogue between persuasion researchers and consultation trainers. Future training should, like all consultation training, not only inform participants of relevant research but also allow for actual skill rehearsal. And, as in any research area, the ongoing process of research will lead to new findings and new questions. As research in persuasion continues to progress it will add greatly to school consultation's growing empirical and theoretical base.

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