

Foot-In-The-Door Application in Organization: How Employees Could be More Effective?

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Abstract

In social psychology, the Foot-In-The-Door (FITD) technique is well-known as a compliance procedure. Its effectiveness depends on dispositional and situational factors. This technique is used for changing or creating attitudes and/or behaviours. The typical experimental procedure increases compliance to a target request by preceding it with a smaller one. The current study investigates whether the Foot-In-The-Door situation would be effective with a final request that is not prosocial in nature. The Foot-In-The-Door manipulation is evaluated in a population of workmen. One-hundred-and-forty-one participants are randomly assigned to one of the two conditions: a Foot-In-The-Door procedure and an alternative Foot-In-The-Door procedure with two preparatory requests. The study widens the results of the Foot-In-The-Door technique to an industrial situation.

Keywords: Foot-In-The-Door, Commitment, Behaviour, Organization

1. Introduction

More than 30 years ago, Freedman & Fraser (1966) showed that housewives accepted more than twice to receive at home interviewers for 2 hours if three days before they answered a few simple questions by phone. The Foot-In-The-Door principle is simple: a subject who is asked to achieve a first request is more likely to comply with a second larger request. The compliance is greater in that case when the second larger demand is proposed directly. The FITD is one of the most operational techniques for increasing the commitment. This concept has been defined as the binding between the individual and his acts or his decisions (Kiesler, 1971). This definition has been adapted several times in the experimentation field. In a given situation, the level of commitment corresponds to the conditions under which the act is carried out. In a meta-analytic review, Burger (1999) indicated that the effectiveness of the FITD application depended on certain conditions. The effects produced 10% to 20% more behaviors in a situation of "compliance without pressure". The literature shows that most of

the time the studies are based on prosocial requests such as organ donation (Girandola, 2002), cancer prevention (Dolin & Booth-Butterfield, 1995), or fund collection (Bell et al., 1994). However, studies have reported that the FITD technique is ineffective for increasing compliance when the request is too hard. Our study goes into details of the foot-in-the-door principle and applies it in an industrial context where the request is just costly and not prosocial.

The prosocial requests aim at bringing assistance to others, to aid organizations. It is particularly for this nature of request that the FITD procedure is recognized all over the world. The present study investigates the strength of the FITD technique when the request is compliance in a workplace. The effects of compliance are not guaranteed. The studies undertaken in the organizational situation are not common. In the business conditions, it seems sometimes difficult for managers to improve the commitment of their employees. Our study speculates that the Foot-In-The-Door technique can have positive effects on the employees' attitudes and behaviors, even with professional requests.

The Foot-In-The-Door procedure was examined as an alternative approach to obtain greater motivation in counseling context (Sharkey et al., 1989). The researchers evaluated the situation by the participation rate in a workshop (behaviour) and the answers of a questionnaire (attitude). In the compliance condition, the interviewers asked the subjects by phone to make a list of their strengths and their weaknesses in communication and to bring it to the meeting. In the control condition, the interviewers called just to confirm the appointment time. At the end of the counselling session, the participants were asked to read a description of a communication workshop and put in writing their willingness to participate. And after the session, they answered a questionnaire about motivation to change. The results highlighted that participants in the FITD situation demonstrated greater motivation to change than the participants in the control condition. However, the participation rate in the workshop was not significant. Calling before the meeting seemed to have a minor influence on the intent to participate in the workshop. Compliance with the initial request had a motivating effect on the participants. In this study, attitude has been impacted, but not behaviour.

The literature does not provide a full answer on how to enhance the behavioural compliance in an organizational context. Louche and Lanneau (2004) investigated the FITD strategy to obtain behavioural compliance in an organizational context: a training activity. Two hypotheses are formulated. The first one refers to attitude: the commitment should infer a positive attitude in order to comply with safety regulations and this attitude should be maintained in the long run. The other one is related to behaviour: the committed employees should be more active during the training time. The attitudes were assessed twice the following year by an 8 item-questionnaire. The behaviours were assessed by the work preparation sessions and the participation rate during the exercises. Significant commitment effects were observed on both attitudes and behaviours. After a year, committed workers maintained their positive attitudes toward safety but their behaviours were only assessed during the session time, not in the long run. The number of accidents in the company has however decreased but the researchers admit some limitations of the study: the research protocol can not give evidence of the link between this decrease and the generated commitment.

In other situations, the effectiveness of the Foot-In-The-Door technique has been verified for years, but when the initial request is too easy, the FITD procedure does not produce compliance (Seligman & al., 1976). Stice, Chase, Stormer and Appel (2001) tested the compliance strategy by using several initial tasks. They decided to develop a dissonance eating disorder prevention program that attempted to reduce thin-ideal internalization in a population of young women. To that purpose, the authors led the female participants to carry out preparatory acts during three weekly 1-hr sessions: group discussions, verbal and written exercises. Each act was carried out willingly. The women completed a questionnaire three times: at the beginning, after the first session and 4 weeks after the last session. Consistent with hypotheses, the participants showed significant decreases in thin-ideal feeling and improved their own body satisfaction. However, the period of the study was brief; the consequences have not been assessed after the prevention intervention. So it is not clear whether the positive effects would persist over time.

Goldman and his colleagues (1981) went further into the Foot-In-The-Door application to increase behavioural effects. They called 120 residents who were randomly assigned to six conditions with one, two or three different level tasks. The simple request was to ask the subjects to give two radio stations that they listened to most often and the hard request consisted of asking them to keep track of all the records they would listen to for the next six weeks, then to mail the song sheet back to the interviewers. The researchers evaluated the commitment of the participants according to the type of response given to the final task. The results indicated a significant difference in the compliance rate obtained in the simple request condition and in the conditions that required two or three tasks. Indeed the typical two-request foot-in-the-door condition produced more compliance than the simple request condition. And the three-task FITD procedure increased compliance when compared to the two-task FITD, but only when the intermediate task was of a moderate level. It may be assumed that an individual making repeated requests stops complying when the level of the tasks is too critical. The authors suggested calling the Foot-In-The-Door technique with two preparatory requests, the two Feet-In-The-Door technique. In the present study, we would like to compare a FITD procedure with one and two preparatory requests. We expect that the behavior would be more influenced by the three-task FITD procedure than by the classic one.

We investigate the relation between the FITD application and the quality of the actions. Several studies showed that in a Foot-In-The-Door situation, it was possible to obtain more responses to a survey. The accuracy and the completeness of a questionnaire are important aspects to take into consideration. But which study has assessed the quality of the answers? Wynn & Mc Daniel (1985) made the assumption that an individual who agrees to take a survey would do a more careful job at it. The stronger the commitment is, the more painstaking the answers are. In the experimental condition, an interviewer phoned a number of subjects (n=569) and introduced himself as someone who worked for a club. He asked them 3 questions about what they thought of the club. Then, they received a small questionnaire by mail which took 10 minutes to fill in. In the control condition, the primary contact did not take place. The questionnaire was composed of 45 questions. It was used to assess the number of omitted questions and the response rate. In the experimental condition, the response rate had indeed increased but no difference was noticed about the quality of the answers. For the researchers, this result was due to a preparatory request which was too simple.

Increasing the commitment of employees is a strategic and managerial goal for the companies. The researchers in social sciences and, in particular, in social psychology, can help organizations enhance compliance in various projects. The objective of our study is to present experimental research undertaken in an industrial company where the Foot-In-The-Door strategy is used to change the employees' behaviours.

2. Method

Participants

The experiment takes place between July 2006 and January 2007 in an international company which is the world leader of tableware products and employs 19,000 people around the world. One-hundred-and-forty-one people - 94 % are men, 78 % are workmen and 51 % are not graduated - who were involved in the "5S project" were approached randomly in the headquarters located in the North of France.

Procedure

The executive board decided to improve business management and business processes by defining a common base for daily operations. The project is called 5S. Their objectives consist in creating a well-ordered, nice work environment to promote efficiency, and indicators to improve performance. The goal of the experimentation is to increase the people's level of commitment during this project. For that, we create two conditions.

In the FITD condition, all the subjects receive a questionnaire about the "5S project" containing 12 questions as a preparatory task. The questionnaire was given just after the introduction meeting. For

each assertion the subject has to answer: "I totally, partly, slightly or do not at all agree with". For example, we would like to know whether "it's important to be involved in a project". The full questionnaire is available at the end of the article (Appendix 1).

In the alternative FITD condition, we add another request before the questionnaire. In small groups of 10, the experimenter asks employees (Appendix 2) to express their feelings about this project, what they are ready to do, what they expect from the project. All the answers are written on a board in front of everyone. Everybody can give his point of view and argue his position. The discussion was limited to 15 minutes. The answers are individual but they are known by the whole group.

The compliance is assessed by the number and the quality of actions made. The FITD technique should generate a high degree of compliance. First, a test is made to validate the list of the action types (Appendix 3) we want the participants to achieve. For example, the company runs in 5-8h shifts. Each team has its own tools. Altogether, there are 5 pieces of each tool. One action is to create a space to share the different tools like an open-end wrench, or a drilling machine. So instead of buying or repairing the same tool 5 times, you have to do it only once. 30 action types were identified. The quality of each action is assessed on a five-point scale: 1 = simple action to 5 = complex action, to better understand the scale, a field example was given for each degree. When it comes to managing the work environment, moving a desk is a simple action and reorganizing a workshop is a complex action. The difference between the two actions is not difficult to understand. First, we go on the field and ask the subjects to show us what has been done following the requests. And then the experimenter evaluates the actions based on the defined scale.

3. Results

The number of actions actually carried out in the alternative Foot-In-The-Door condition is higher than in the Foot-In-The-Door condition. The alternative procedure provides a significant effect on the action rate ($t(141) = 11.34, p < .001$). With two preparatory requests instead of one, the employees are doing 17 % more of the actions. Thus, we got 14.0 actions made after the alternative Foot-In-The-Door condition, instead of 8.75 actions in the Foot-In-The-Door condition.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of the action rate

Quantity	Foot-In-The-Door Condition	Alternative Foot-In-The-Door Condition
	N=105	N=36
Mean	8.75/30	14.0/30
SD	2.77	0.0

The quality of actions carried out in the alternative Foot-In-The-Door condition differed from the quality of actions in the Foot-In-The-Door condition. With the alternative procedure, the quality of actions is significantly higher ($t(141) = 2.40, p < .02$), the participants achieved more complexities. In the alternative condition, the means of the behaviour is 3.42 instead of 2.92 in the Foot-In-The-Door condition. The quality has increased by 10 %.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of the quality of actions - in general

Quality	Foot-In-The-Door Condition	Alternative Foot-In-The-Door Condition
	N=105	N=36
Mean	2.93/5	3.42/5
SD	1.06	1.04

More precisely, we submit one action type to the two conditions, the previous results are confirmed. The quality increases by 10 %. With two requests instead of one, the actions are better done

($t(141) = 3.00, p < .005$). The number of initial requests has effects on the quality of the produced behaviour.

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations of the quality of actions - when we compare the same action after the two conditions.

Quality	Foot-In-The-Door Condition	Alternative Foot-In-The-Door Condition
	N=105	N=36
Mean	2.94/5	3.50/5
SD	0.99	0.98

4. Discussion

The results of our study suggest that a procedure with two preparatory requests would have greater chance of generating compliance. This method could be assimilated to a two Feet-In-The-Door technique (Goldman et al., 1981). Even if the typical two-task procedure does generate compliance, the three-task Foot-In-The-Door procedure has proven to be more effective with a higher degree of compliance. With two preparatory requests, the procedure induces more contact between the subjects and the experimenter before the third and final request, each request introducing the next one. The repeated use of requests could create an extreme level of compliance (Seligman, C., Bush, M., Kirsch, K., 1976). The two preparatory requests could be assimilated to one high preparatory task. A FITD procedure with a high involvement would have the greatest chance of generating compliance.

This study shows that the FITD technique could improve not only the action rate but also the quality of actions. The employees spend more time on the actions and their level of complexity is higher. The two-FITD procedure produces greater compliance, especially when we expect to generate high quality actions. Previously, the FITD principle did not show any effect concerning the quality of behaviours (Hansen & Robinson, 1980; Wynn & McDaniel, 1985). In general, those studies concentrated on action rate. The researchers explained that the lack of compliance could be the result of a preparatory request which is too low.

Instead of taking care of internal conditions of compliance like emotion, leadership or value, we decide to stay focus on external conditions. An initial request made in front of an audience (a public request) is known to produce further compliance (Girandola, 2003). The public commitment is linked to the public image or the social reputation which is due to group recognition. The association of a two FITD procedure with a public request has an impact on the employees' motivation to carry out actions. According to the commitment theory (Joule and Beauvois, 1998), a public request carried out in a freedom situation increases the sense of responsibility.

The FITD technique improves compliance mainly in prosocial situations but its application provided some other good results in an industrial context (Louche & Lanneau, 2004): The technique showed a positive influence on employees' attitudes. This present study illustrates how a two FITD procedure can be efficient in changing employees' behaviour as well. The results of our study can be useful to explain how to apply the FITD procedure in an organizational context and how to enhance the quantity and quality of professional actions. This procedure offers an alternative for stimulating employees' autonomy and responsibility, so that they act more and better. Continuing research in an industrial context can contribute to evaluating how possible it is to influence other aspects of employees' behaviour. For example, can the FITD effects be used to promote employees' self-training?

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: List of assertions in the questionnaire

1. The 5S actions allow you to free up some time
2. The standards in place are not observed
3. It is important to participate in the refresher session (sequence 3)
4. 5S is the responsibility of the 5S technician only
5. 5S is a waste of time
6. You are interested in the 5S project and the visual management
7. It is important to be involved in the project
8. The 5S action and the visual management will continue

Appendix 2: Questions

1. What aspects of your environment should the 5S focus on first (cite at least one)?
2. Imagine the arguments/gains that the 5S will bring to your work? (time, space...)
3. Who would be interested in setting up a 5S action or who has spontaneously performed such an action before? Which action has been implemented?

Appendix 3: List of identified actions

1. Moving of some equipment (test bench, test cabinet)
2. Bicycle shed, Communication board
3. Evacuation of equipment (cabinet, workbenches)
4. Delimitation of a storage area (outside, inside)
5. Delimitation of a pick up/drop off area
6. Delimitation of the work area
7. Integration of several production units
8. Floor marking (passage Health and Safety Committee)
9. Application of some paint (workbenches, machine)
10. Installation of storage units (shelves)
11. Display instructions (machine safety, end of shift)
12. Self-evaluation
13. Resorting of the ZAD (re-use of the equipment when possible)
14. Organization of waste sorting
15. Definition of a layout plan (paper)
16. Maintenance and respect of the layout
17. Empowerment of people per zone
18. Machine installation or renovation (motor)
19. Cleaning of work clothes (reviews the way the department is running)
20. Cleaning kit, cleaning plan
21. Pool tools on a tools panel (visual)
22. Draw up an inventory and formalize the content
23. Re-use of the ZAD
24. Waste management
25. Arrange the work environment (cable trays, posts, pipes, lights)
26. Pool the equipment (cabinets, samples)
27. New standards (folders, work instructions)
28. Regular meetings
29. Standardization of personal spaces (arrangement, offices, workbenches)
30. Establishment of an advanced warehouse (inventory management)