

# Salespeople's Use of Upward Influence Tactics (UITs) in Coping With Role Stress

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*Researchers' attentions have recently focused on how salespeople cope with role stress. This study focuses on salespersons' use of six upward influence tactics (UITs) with the immediate sales manager, and how salespeople use UITs to lessen the impact of two role stressors (perceived role conflict and role ambiguity) associated with the sales job. The study also evaluates the potential moderating role of UITs on relationships between role stress and manager satisfaction and propensity to leave. Analysis of data gathered from a heterogeneous sample revealed differences in use of UITs between salespeople classified as either high or low in role stress. Salespeople who perceive high role conflict employ assertiveness and upward appeal UITs more frequently. Salespeople who perceive high role ambiguity use exchange and coalition-building UITs more frequently. Results also suggest that salespersons' use of assertiveness and ingratiation UITs exacerbate relationships between perceived role ambiguity and two outcomes: satisfaction with supervisor and propensity to leave. Implications of the study findings for sales managers are reviewed, as are implications for further research.*

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In performing the boundary-spanning role, salespeople interact with many people inside and outside the organization, each of whom acts on behalf of personal needs,

demands, and expectations (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987, Pruden and Reese 1972). Such purposeful interactions entail a large role set, diverse goals, and consequent incompatibility of expectations between the salesperson and various role partners. Incompatibility of expectations between the salesperson and various role partners, particularly the sales manager, often contributes to salespeople's perceptions of role stress (role conflict and role ambiguity, Goolsby 1992; Michaels, Cron, Dubinsky, and Joachimsthaler 1988; Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1975).

Within the sales organization hierarchy, the salesperson turns to the immediate sales manager to reduce incompatibilities in expectations and to clarify vague areas. Thus the salesperson uses the sales manager to influence sources of role conflict and role ambiguity with the ultimate objective of increasing performance and job satisfaction. However, as boundary spanners who are charged with gaining compliance, salespeople come into conflict with the standing rules and procedures of the organization, and have to overcome the manager's resistance in cases where beliefs differ concerning procedures and policies. To influence such stressful conditions, salespeople may decrease work effort, express dissatisfaction with the manager, withdraw from the job through absenteeism or turnover, or express a desire to withdraw. Another means of resolving role stress involves the salesperson's use of upward influence tactics (UITs). Porter (1981) defines upward influence as "attempts to influence someone higher in the formal hierarchy of authority in the organization" (p. 111). UITs provide the salesperson with a proactive alternative to increase control over the job under conditions of excessive role conflict or role ambiguity (Thompson 1981).

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On the other hand, salespeople also use UITs as proactive, problem-oriented coping tactics (Keaveney and Nelson 1993; Latack 1986; Strutton and Lumpkin 1993, 1994). Should perceived role stress exceed expectations, the salesperson copes by influencing someone who seems able to alter the situation: the immediate manager. Unfortunately, little is known concerning how salespeople direct UITs at the sales manager to reduce role stress. Yet sales management could use greater knowledge concerning how salespeople employ UITs to improve the quality of communication between sales manager and salesperson, and to secure better understanding of the relationship between salesperson and sales manager.

This study is predicated on the idea that sales managers can improve their ability to communicate effectively with salespeople by understanding how salespeople use UITs. Pursuit of a greater understanding of how salespeople accommodate the stressful aspect of the job warrants investigation of salespeople's use of UITs on their immediate supervisor (or manager). The study addresses salespeople's use of UITs to influence the immediate sales manager under conditions of role stress (i.e., role conflict and role ambiguity). Also of interest is the influence of UITs on relationships between role stress, and two sales job outcomes: satisfaction with the supervisor and propensity to leave. From the results of the study, researchers will gain a broader perspective concerning how salespeople respond to job stress.

## CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Field research suggests two important points concerning UITs: (1) employees attempt to minimize role stress by targeting influencing behaviors at their superiors (Deluga 1989), and (2) employees' use of influence tactics reduces perceived stress (Thompson 1981). Marketing researchers have investigated influence tactics used in different contexts (Frazier and Rody 1991; Kale 1986; Kohli 1985). Results of these efforts indicate that people employ different tactics to influence customers in different situations. However, researchers have focused little attention on tactics salespeople use to influence their sales manager. Research addressing salespeople's use of UITs on the sales manager and the related outcomes of this practice is warranted, given the importance ascribed to the relationship between salesperson and sales manager relative to satisfaction and retention of salespeople (Fry, Futrell, Parasuraman, and Chmielewski 1986; Johnston, Parasuraman, Futrell, and Black 1990).

Sustained focus on job stress as it is perceived and acted upon by salespeople makes the body of literature addressing role stress in the sales job a solid base for developing hypothesized relationships. A substantial number of sales-management-oriented studies support linkages between role stressors, job satisfaction, and retention (e.g., Behrman and Perreault 1984, Johnston et al. 1990; Netemeyer, Johnston, and Burton 1990; Sager 1994). Meta-analysis of the body of research addressing salespeople's job satisfaction conducted by Brown and Peterson

(1993) indicates a consistent, strong relationship between role stressors and satisfaction. In general, the studies suggest an indirect relationship between salespeople's perceptions of role stress and propensity to leave through other variables, such as job satisfaction and commitment (Johnston et al. 1990; Sager 1994). However, the nature of the intervening linkage remains to be identified—and coping and UITs certainly may occur in that area.

## Influence Tactics

Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980) classify types of informal influence used in organizations as upward (UITs directed at superiors), downward (UITs directed at subordinates), or lateral (UITs directed at coworkers). Here, interest focuses on salespeople's use of UITs, informal influence tactics directed at the immediate superior.

Kipnis et al. (1980) and several other researchers proposed taxonomies of influence tactics and developed measures to operationalize employees' use of influence tactics (Jones and Pittman 1982; Tedeschi and Melburg 1984; Wayne and Ferris 1990; Yukl and Falbe 1990). Schriesheim and Hinkin (1990) refined the taxonomy and UIT measure developed by Kipnis et al. (1980). The Schriesheim and Hinkin (1990) taxonomy is among the more popular approaches to operationalizing UITs. Table 1 delineates the six UITs proposed by Schriesheim and Hinkin. Definitions of the UITs have been adapted to fit the sales force as a research population. Hypothesized relationships will be phrased using the six UITs from the Schriesheim and Hinkin taxonomy.

Several researchers have grouped the six UITs to facilitate interpretation. The groupings can be viewed from two standpoints, specific applications or shared qualities. For example, Kipnis and Schmidt (1985) classified influence tactics qualitatively as either soft (i.e., friendliness or ingratiation), hard (i.e., assertiveness, coalition building, and upward appeal), or rational (i.e., rationality and exchange). The three themes correspond partially to coping strategies suggested by Latack (1986). Kapoor, Ansari, and Shukla (1986) arrayed influence tactics as overt (i.e., rationality) or covert (i.e., ingratiation), seemingly taking an application perspective. Likewise, Spiro and Perreault (1979) and Brown (1990) classified influence tactics as either open (i.e., straightforward and legitimate) or closed (i.e., deceptive, or characterized by hidden objectives).

Relative to the growing base of empirical literature in the organizational setting (e.g., Ansari and Kapoor 1987; Erez and Rim 1982; Judge and Bretz 1994; Yukl and Tracey 1992), employees' use of UITs in marketing organizations has received limited attention (cf. Brown 1990; Kohli 1985). Among the studies that have examined the use of influence tactics, Frazier and Rody (1991) and Kale (1986) explored the use of influence tactics in the context of supplier-distributor relationships. Spiro and Perreault (1979) evaluated industrial salespeople's use of influence tactics during interactions with customers, and they also examined the characteristics of buyer-seller situations that affect salespeople's choice of influence tactics. In the

**TABLE 1**  
**Definitions of Upward Influence Tactics**

Upward influence tactics	Involve ways in which salespersons influence their superiors to secure their approbation and to protect or enhance their individual or organizational interests
Rationality	The salesperson uses logical arguments or rational presentation of facts to a superior with the intention of achieving certain objectives
Exchange	The salesperson reminds the superior of a prior favor to be reciprocated or makes an explicit or implicit promise of some favor if they comply with a request or support a proposal
Ingratation	The salesperson acts humble, praises superiors, or tries to get them in a good mood or to think favorably of him or her before asking them to do something
Assertiveness	The salesperson demands or threatens the superior to make them comply with a request or accept a proposal
Coalition building	The salesperson seeks the aid of others to persuade his or her immediate superiors to do something, or uses the support of others as an argument for their superiors to agree
Upward appeal	The salesperson bypasses his or her immediate superiors and appeals to higher authority for assistance in gaining the immediate superior's approval of a request or proposal

NOTE Complete definitions of UITs can be found in Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980), Schriesheim and Hinkin (1990), and Yukl and Falbe (1990). Their definitions of UITs have been altered in Table 1 to correspond more closely to the sales environment.

context of the salesperson-to-sales-manager relationships, Kohli (1985) examined the effects of salespeople's impressions of upward influence behaviors of sales managers on salespeople's perceptions of role clarity, self-esteem, job satisfaction, and work motivation. Although Kohli (1985) focused on salespeople's impressions of their manager's influence with superiors, no attention has been devoted to salespeople's use of UITs in the organizational context and, in particular, of UITs salespeople direct upward toward sales managers. If salespeople's use of specific UITs lessens the stressfulness of the salesperson-to-sales-manager relationship, then potential exists to enhance the effectiveness of that relationship, and ultimately to increase performance of salespeople.

### Role Stress and Salespeople's Use of UITs

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) contend that the experience of role stress (e.g., role conflict and role ambiguity) involves two principal cognitive processes: recognition and reaction. Under recognition, the salesperson interprets a situation as stressful. Within reaction, the salesperson formulates a strategy for coping with the role stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as "cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the

resources of persons" (p. 141). Coping strategies can be either proactive or reactive. A salesperson who enacts a proactive coping strategy actively seeks and combines support from available sources to increase control. A salesperson's use of UITs to influence the sales manager reflects a proactive coping strategy. Here, UITs are conceived as proactive behaviors salespeople employ to gain control of, alter, or manage the situation (Adams 1976). Results of studies that have examined use of UITs as coping mechanisms for role stress support the view that employees' use of UITs can reduce role stress (Deluga 1989; Thompson 1981). Deluga (1989) found that employees who exhibited higher levels of role conflict used UITs more frequently.

Both theory (Brown 1990; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal 1964; Lawrence and Lorsch 1967) and empirical evidence (Deluga 1989) suggest that salespeople use UITs extensively, given the boundary-spanning nature and the potential for role stress associated with the sales job. Kahn et al. (1964) posit that persons occupying organizational boundary roles operate in situations where they often lack formal authority, and therefore must resort to personal forms of influence. Similarly, Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) suggest that persons functioning as integrators, those who have the responsibility of coordinating efforts across departmental and organizational boundaries, rely on informal influence tactics because their formal authority may be inadequate. Because salespeople work across departmental and organizational boundaries, and thereby encounter conflict and ambiguity attached to that role, one could expect them to frequently rely on means of influence other than the formal authority vested in their positions.

### HYPOTHESIZED RELATIONSHIPS

Role conflict and role ambiguity are the two most extensively researched dimensions of role stress (Murphy 1987; Van Sell, Brief, and Schuler 1981). Consistent evidence supports delineation between role conflict and role ambiguity as dimensions of role stress (House, Schuler, and Levanoni 1983; Kelloway and Barling 1990; Van Sell et al. 1981). Accordingly, this study examines separately relationships between the two types of role stress and salespeople's use of UITs.

### Role Conflict and Salespeople's Use of UITs

Role conflict occurs when a salesperson perceives incompatibility between expectations of two or more role set members (Walker et al. 1975). In some selling situations, role conflict triggers coping through use of UITs. When the pressure generated by diversity and incompatibility of goals is minimal and the need for flexibility is accommodated within the formal organizational structure (i.e., role conflict is low), there will be little need for the salesperson to cope through use of UITs. In such situations, a salesperson may employ reactive coping tactics such as accep-

tance, denial, and milder forms of withdrawal (Fulk and Wendler 1982). However, when pressure attributable to diversity and incompatibility of demands from various role partners is higher, and the salesperson feels that the organizational structure and policies lack the flexibility necessary to manage the job (i.e., role conflict is high), the salesperson may use UITs directed at gaining greater control over the situation (Miles 1977; Thompson 1981).

Support for the contention that salespeople use UITs to influence their manager when role conflict is high can be found in classic research and in more recent research reported in the organizational behavior and organization theory literatures. In an analysis of Spanish colonial bureaucracy, Phelen (1960) concluded that, in the presence of multiple and conflicting standards whose relative importance is indeterminate, subordinates select those standards that benefit them the most, encouraging use of coalition building and exchange UITs. Phelen (1960) also reported that, under conflict, subordinates select those standards most likely to be used by superiors in evaluating them, reflecting use of the ingratiation UIT. Kahn et al. (1964) found that persons reporting greater role conflict stated that their trust in their superiors was low, and that they disliked their superiors. Similarly, Keller (1975) reported negative correlations between role conflict and satisfaction with supervision. Such conflict-laden superior-subordinate relationships encourage the use of UITs, such as exchange, coalition, upward appeal, and assertiveness, which are characterized by lack of trust, faith, and understanding. Also, Deluga (1989) found higher levels of role conflict positively related to employees' frequency of use of UITs. Based on the above rationale and empirical evidence concerning circumstances and frequency of UITs targeted to managers, the following relationships are hypothesized:

H1: Salespeople who perceive high role conflict in their jobs use UITs (i.e., rationality, exchange, ingratiation, assertiveness, coalition building, and upward appeal) more frequently than do salespeople who perceive low role conflict.

### Role Ambiguity and Salespeople's Use of UITs

Role ambiguity is the extent to which the salesperson believes information is lacking regarding the (a) expectations associated with a role, (b) methods for fulfilling the known role expectations, and (c) consequences of role performance (Graen 1976; Van Sell et al. 1981). Like role conflict, role ambiguity is inherent in the salesperson's job (Teas 1983; Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1977). The boundary-spanning nature of the job, existence of a large role set, and interaction with multiple role partners contribute to salesperson's perceptions of uncertainty about role expectations and role performance. Also, as occupants of innovative roles, salespeople often face situations where no standard procedures or past experience exist to guide them (Walker et al. 1975). If uncertainty associated with the sales job is chronic and high, salespeople may be

prompted to use UITs to increase control over their environment (Thompson 1981).

Evidence drawn from various studies supports the viewpoint that salespeople who perceive higher role ambiguity use UITs more frequently. Researchers employing both experimental and longitudinal research designs to examine the influence of perceived role ambiguity on employees' attitudes and behaviors found lack of clarity about performance and behavioral expectations to be associated with unfavorable attitudes and resentment toward superiors (Caplan and Jones 1975; Cohen 1959; Johnson and Graen 1973). Such unfavorable attitudes toward immediate superiors may encourage salespeople's use of UITs, such as coalition building and assertiveness. Furthermore, high levels of role ambiguity foster increased hostility toward role partners (Smith 1967), cause compliance problems (Brief and Aldag 1976), and result in frequent violations of chain of command (Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970). In a sales environment, dislike of the sales manager ascribable to high-ambiguity perceptions may prompt a salesperson's use of upward appeal to levels above the immediate sales manager (the upward appeal UIT in Table 1). Alternately, a salesperson may employ assertiveness with the sales manager as a UIT. Given such findings, it is also possible that salespeople may employ softer UITs such as ingratiation and exchange to influence the manager in situations where they lack confidence or experience. In general, results of empirical research suggest that employees who perceive higher role ambiguity are more likely to employ UITs with their manager. Therefore, it is hypothesized that

H2: Salespeople who perceive high role ambiguity use UITs (i.e., rationality, exchange, ingratiation, assertiveness, coalition building, and upward appeal) more frequently than do salespeople who perceive low role ambiguity.

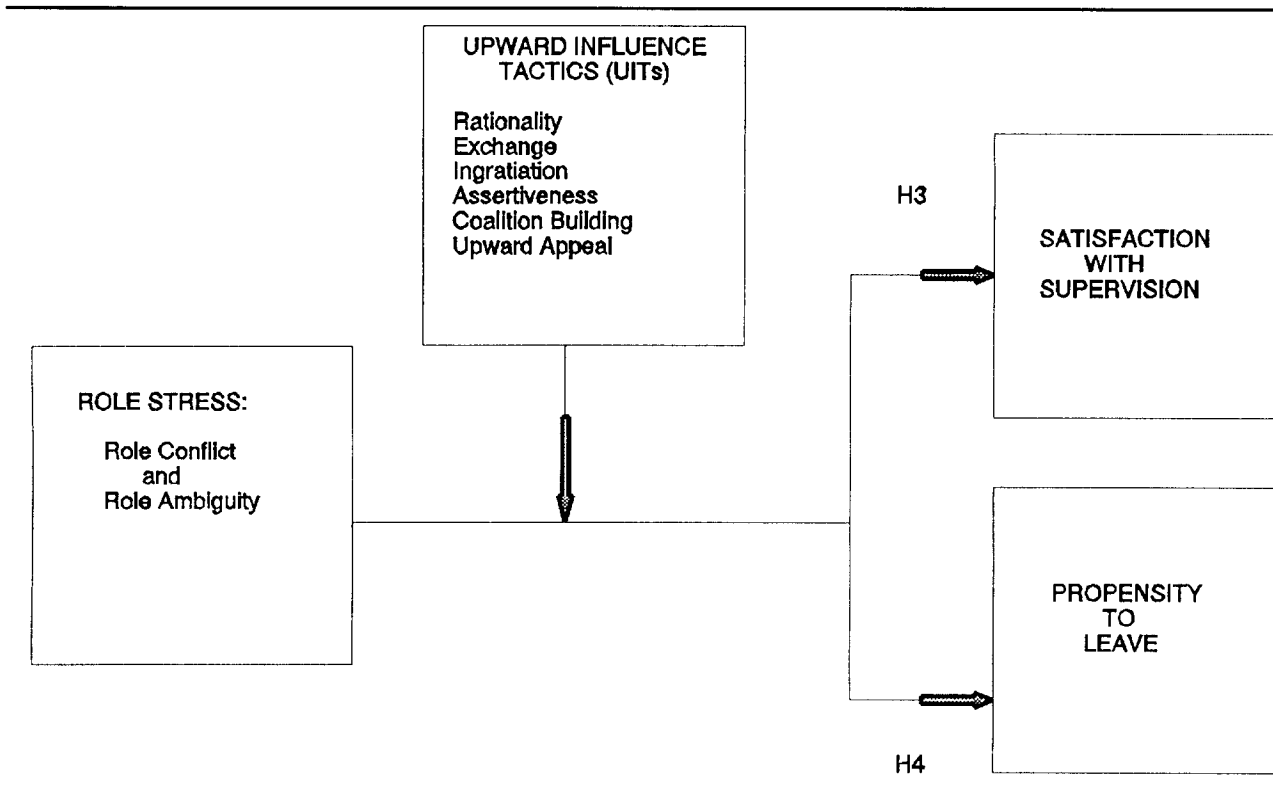
### UITs and Sales Job Outcomes

The importance of role conflict and role ambiguity to sales managers and sales researchers lies in the potential relationships they have to relevant job outcomes such as performance, job satisfaction, and retention (Michaels and Dixon 1994). The following discussion proposes potential relationships salespeople's use of UITs under conditions of role conflict and role ambiguity may have with two job outcomes: satisfaction with supervisor and propensity to leave.

#### UITs and Satisfaction With Supervisor

Job satisfaction is an emotional state reflecting an affective response to a job situation (Locke 1976). Lawler and Hall (1970) explain that job satisfaction is determined by a perceived discrepancy between what an individual expects to get out of a job and what the employee believes the job actually provides. Supervisor satisfaction, then, is a facet of job satisfaction that reflects an employee's affective disposition toward the sales manager arising from a discrepancy between expectations and perceived actuality.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Hypothesized Moderating Influence of UITs on Outcomes of Salespersons' Role Stress Perceptions**



Supervisor satisfaction was chosen for the present research because of its focus on UITs salespeople direct at the immediate manager.

Although researchers have not directly investigated relationships between the use of UITs and various facets of job satisfaction (e.g., supervision, work, pay, coworkers, and promotion), a theoretical rationale, derived mainly from studies on the use of power bases and leader-subordinate interactions, exists for developing a priori hypotheses. Such hypotheses hold that salespeople's use of UITs moderates the relationship between perceived role stress and satisfaction with supervision.

A real possibility exists that individuals' use of certain UITs may explain a significant proportion of the unexplained variation between role stress and satisfaction with manager. Indirect evidence exists supporting an expectation that salespeople's use of UITs moderates relationships between role stress and outcomes. Results of meta-analysis reported by Jackson and Schuler (1985) indicate that high levels of unexplained variation exist between role stress and several outcome variables, including job satisfaction. Hall (1972) found a strong relationship between behaviors designed to reduce the impact of job stress and job satisfaction. UITs are behaviors intended to reduce the impact of role stress and, if successful, may enhance satisfaction with the sales manager.

Incorporating UITs into proposed relationships between role stressors and satisfaction with supervisor could

reasonably be expected to account for increased variation in certain outcome variables. Therefore, salespeople's frequency of use of six UITs is expected to moderate relationships between role stress perceptions and supervisor satisfaction. Figure 1 summarizes the expected relationships (H3a and H3b). Relative to Figure 1, it is hypothesized that

- H3a: UITs (i.e., rationality, exchange, ingratiation, assertiveness, coalition building, and upward appeal) moderate the relationship between role ambiguity and satisfaction with the supervisor.
- H3b: UITs (i.e., rationality, exchange, ingratiation, assertiveness, coalition building, and upward appeal) moderate the relationship between role conflict and satisfaction with the supervisor.

#### UITs and Propensity to Leave

High propensity to leave signifies withdrawal, a process that represents declining participation in a job, rather than turnover, a discrete exit behavior (Rosse and Hulin 1985). For example, an employee may be constrained from leaving the job, yet possess a high propensity to leave (Bowen 1982). In a sales job, withdrawal can manifest as lateness, absenteeism, avoidance behavior, or lowered performance (Pines and Aronson 1988; Rosse and Hulin 1985). Thus examining relationships between sales-

people's use of UITs and propensity to leave may be more useful than examining salespeople's use of UITs and turnover.

Given the need to incorporate propensity to leave as a key outcome variable in studies of salesperson behavior, this study investigates how salespeople's use of UITs moderates relationships between role stressors and propensity to leave. The literature on coping provides theoretical justification for the hypothesized moderator relationships. The standpoint taken here is that whether salespeople succumb to role stress, as evidenced by high propensity to leave, or resolve to overcome role stress, depends on how they cope (Folkman and Lazarus 1980; Lazarus and Folkman 1984). A salesperson can use UITs, a proactive coping strategy, to actively seek and combine support from available sources to gain control. Figure 1 summarizes proposed relationships between role stress and propensity to leave relative to UITs. Relative to Figure 1, the following relationships are hypothesized:

H4a: Salespeople's use of UITs (i.e., rationality, exchange, ingratiation, assertiveness, coalition building, and upward appeal) moderates the relationship between role ambiguity and propensity to leave.

H4b: Salespeople's use of UITs (i.e., rationality, exchange, ingratiation, assertiveness, coalition building, and upward appeal) moderates the relationship between role conflict and propensity to leave.

## METHOD

### Sample

Data were obtained through self-administered questionnaires, which were mailed to 600 salespeople who subscribed to a selling magazine. Of the 600 questionnaires mailed, 32 were undeliverable. Of the remaining 568 questionnaires, 150 usable questionnaires were returned (26.4%). Respondents were predominantly male ( $n = 112$ ; 75%). Average age of respondents was 35 years. Respondents averaged 10 years of sales experience. Median number of employees in the employing organizations was 200. Salespeople who responded to the questionnaire worked in a variety of businesses and industries. The heterogeneous nature of the sample should increase the generalizability of the results to salespeople as a workplace population.

### Nonresponse Bias and Sample Bias

Assessment of nonresponse bias was conducted using the time-trend extrapolation test (Armstrong and Overton 1977). The test assumes that nonrespondents are more like late respondents than early respondents. No differences were apparent between respondents from the two groups. Analysis of variance was employed to assess possibilities

of response bias attributable to gender. Results suggested no significant differences in their response based on gender.

## Measures

The measure developed by Schriesheim and Hinkin (1990) was used to operationalize salespeople's use of UITs. The scale employs a self-report measure of the relative frequency with which respondents use rationality, exchange, ingratiation, assertiveness, coalition building, and upward appeal as UITs. Five response points ranged from *very infrequently* to *very frequently*. Schriesheim and Hinkin (1990) provided evidence of construct validity and reported alpha reliabilities ranging between .73 and .83 for the six subscales.

Role conflict and role ambiguity were operationalized using scales developed by House and Rizzo (1972). The House and Rizzo (1972) instrument is widely used and has been found to be reliable and valid (Schuler, Aldag, and Brief 1977).

Salespeople's satisfaction with supervisor was measured using 18 items from the supervisor facet of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI; Smith, Kendall, and Hulin 1969). The JDI has been extensively used to measure job satisfaction (Roznowski 1989) and is considered to be one of the most thoroughly researched measures of its kind (Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, and Weick 1970).

Propensity to leave was measured using the four-item Stay/Leave Index (SLI) developed by Bluedorn (1982). Items asked the salesperson to estimate chances of quitting the present job over four time intervals (3 months, 6 months, 1 year, or 2 years).

## Data Analysis

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using a two-stage sequence. First, overall differences in salespeople's use of UITs across the high and low role stress groups were assessed using MANOVA. Second, systematic differences in the direction of the use of each UIT were evaluated across high and low stress groups using *t* tests. To effect analysis of H1 and H2, salespeople's responses on role conflict and role ambiguity were dichotomized using a median split. The use of two groups parallels techniques employed in other studies reported in the sales management literature (e.g., Futrell and Parasuraman 1984; Ingram, Lee, and Lucas 1991).

The moderator hypotheses (3a, 3b, 4a, and 4b) conceptualized in Figure 1 were tested using moderated multiple regression (MMR). Hypothesized moderator effects were tested using the cross-products of the partial regression coefficient (Dunlap and Kemery 1987). Decisions regarding moderator variables were framed on the taxonomy described by Sharma, Durand, and Gur-Arie (1981). The decision rules are summarized as (a) if the cross-product was significant and the main effect was not significant, the UIT is classified as a *pure moderator*, (b) if the cross-product coefficient was significant and the main effect coefficient was also significant, the UIT is a *quasi-moderator* (i.e., the

**TABLE 2**  
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities for Sample

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 UIT summary score	2.62	0.44	(.74)										
2. Rationality	4.20	0.60	.38**	(.62)									
3. Exchange	1.76	0.77	.69**	.06	(.72)								
4. Ingratiation	2.95	0.76	.52**	.08	.32**	(.51)							
5. Assertiveness	2.03	0.80	.59**	.06	.36**	.10	(.69)						
6. Coalition building	2.60	0.86	.66**	.21**	.31**	.15	.17*	(.73)					
7. Upward appeal	2.02	0.89	.52**	.01	.21**	.09	.25**	.33**	(.62)				
8. Satisfaction with supervisor	2.02	0.75	-.25**	.15	-.15	-.13	-.30**	-.17*	-.19*	(.89)			
9. Role conflict	2.60	0.78	-.40**	.05	.22**	.20*	.28**	.29**	.29**	-.53**	(.84)		
10. Role ambiguity	2.19	0.75	.13	-.21**	.12	.09	.11	.19*	.05	-.48**	.52**	(.85)	
11. Propensity to leave	2.16	1.16	.28**	-.01	.20*	.16*	.30**	.06	.26**	-.50**	.31**	.35*	(.95)

NOTE: Reliability coefficients appear on the diagonal within parentheses

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

**TABLE 3**  
MANOVA and *t* Test Results for Salespersons' Use of Upward Influence Tactics and Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity

Influence Tactic	Role Conflict			Role Ambiguity		
	High (n = 64)	Low (n = 86)	t Value	High (n = 63)	Low (n = 87)	t Value
Rationality	4.24	4.17	0.75	4.08	4.28	2.09*
Exchange	1.93	1.63	2.32*	1.95	1.62	2.63**
Ingratiation	3.12	2.81	2.54*	3.10	2.83	2.30*
Assertiveness	2.29	1.84	3.46**	2.20	1.91	2.14*
Coalition building	2.78	2.45	2.35*	2.84	2.43	3.13**
Upward appeal	2.28	1.82	3.06**	2.16	1.91	1.64
Wilks's lambda	4.09**			4.67**		

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

UIT contributes to the relationship both as a predictor and a moderator), and (c) if the cross-product was not significant but the main effect for the UIT was significant, the main effect acts as a *predictor*.

## RESULTS

Table 2 summarizes descriptive statistics, pairwise correlations, and alpha reliabilities for the study variables. Most of the measures exhibited reasonable reliabilities. A possible reason for the lower alpha reliability coefficient for the ingratiation UIT could be the use of only three items to tap the construct (Churchill 1979; Peter 1979). For example, the MIBOS scale developed and validated by Kumar and Beyerlein (1991) uses 20 items to measure ingratiation behaviors of employees in organizations.

### Group Differences

Hypothesis 1 posits that salespeople who perceive high role conflict use influence tactics more frequently than do salespeople who perceive low role conflict. As summarized in Table 3, results of MANOVA indicate a significant overall difference in means for the use of UITs between groups of salespeople categorized as high and low in perceived role conflict,  $F = 4.09$ ,  $p < .005$ . Differences in group means (Table 3) suggest that salespeople who per-

ceive high role conflict use five of the six influence tactics—exchange, ingratiation, assertiveness, coalition building, and upward appeal—more frequently than do salespeople who perceive low role conflict. In particular, assertiveness and upward appeal UITs were used more frequently by salespeople who perceived high role conflict. The findings generally support Hypothesis 1. Notably, though, use of the rationality UIT did not differ significantly between high and low role conflict groups.

Table 3 summarizes tests of UITs by high and low role ambiguity groups, related to Hypothesis 2. As proposed in the hypothesis, a significant difference exists in frequency of use of UITs between salespeople in the high and low role ambiguity groups,  $F = 4.67$ ,  $p < .005$ . Aside from rationality and upward appeal UITs, comparison of means between high and low ambiguity groups of salespeople supports this hypothesis. Salespeople in the high and low ambiguity groups differed in the use of rationality but in the direction opposite that hypothesized. Salespeople who perceived low role ambiguity reported greater frequency of use for the rationality UIT than did salespeople who perceived high role ambiguity (Table 3).

### Moderator Relationships

Figure 2 summarizes regression models used to test Hypotheses 3 and 4. Hypothesis 3a states that UITs moderate the role-ambiguity-to-satisfaction-with-supervisor

**FIGURE 2**  
**Results of Moderated Multiple Regression (MMR) With Standardized Coefficients**  
**for Hypothesized Relationships (absolute *t* statistics are shown in parentheses)**

Satisfaction with Supervisor (SS)		Propensity to Leave (PL)	
<u>Role Ambiguity (H3A)</u>		<u>Role Ambiguity (H4A)</u>	
SS = .02 RAT - .46RA + .10 RA*RAT (.31) (5.9) <sup>a</sup> (1.42)	<u>Adj. R<sup>2</sup></u> 22.0	PL = .02 RAT + .37 RA + .03 RA*RAT (.21) (4.56) <sup>a</sup> (.48)	<u>Adj. R<sup>2</sup></u> 11.2
<b>Not Supported</b>		<b>Not Supported</b>	
SS = -.09 EXC - .47 RA - .07 RA*EXC (1.19) (6.26) <sup>a</sup> (.96)	22.3	PL = .15 EXC + .34 RA + .10 RA*EXC (1.98) <sup>a</sup> (4.48) <sup>a</sup> (1.30)	14.4
<b>Not Supported</b>		<b>Predictor</b>	
SS = -.13 ING - .47 RA - .20 RA*ING (1.85) (6.5) <sup>a</sup> (2.85) <sup>a</sup>	26.1	PL = .19 ING + .35 RA + .16 RA*ING (2.48) <sup>a</sup> (4.60) <sup>a</sup> (2.07) <sup>a</sup>	16.2
<b>Pure Moderator</b>		<b>Quasi Moderator</b>	
SS = -.22 AST - .42 RA - .19 RA*AST (3.2) <sup>a</sup> (5.86) <sup>a</sup> (2.73) <sup>a</sup>	30.4	PL = .26 AST + .31 RA + .13 RA*AST (3.51) <sup>a</sup> (4.18) <sup>a</sup> (1.85)	20.4
<b>Quasi Moderator</b>		<b>Predictor</b>	
SS = -.09 COA - .46 RA + .02 RA*COA (1.26) (6.1) <sup>a</sup> (.30)	21.9	PL = -.03 COA + .36 RA + .03 RA*COA (.39) (4.58) <sup>a</sup> (.46)	11.3
<b>Not Supported</b>		<b>Not Supported</b>	
SS = -.15 UPW - .52 RA - .16 RA*UPW (2.17) <sup>a</sup> (6.97) <sup>a</sup> (2.11) <sup>a</sup>	25.9	PL = .15 UPW + .38 RA + .08 RA*UPW (2.01) <sup>a</sup> (4.81) <sup>a</sup> (1.00)	14.1
<b>Quasi Moderator</b>		<b>Predictor</b>	
<u>Role Conflict H3B</u>		<u>Role Conflict (H4B)</u>	
SS = .15 RAT - .53 RC + .13 RC*RAT (2.1) <sup>a</sup> (7.59) <sup>a</sup> (1.75)	30.0	PL = -.07 RAT + .34 RC + .03 RC*RAT (1.1) (4.40) <sup>a</sup> (.38)	11.5
<b>Predictor</b>		<b>Not Supported</b>	
SS = -.04 EXC - .53 RC - .01 RC*EXC (.51) (6.95) <sup>a</sup> (.10)	26.3	PL = .09 EXC + .29 RC + .13 RC*EXC (1.15) (3.67) <sup>a</sup> (1.85)	13.2
<b>Not Supported</b>		<b>Not Supported</b>	
SS = -.03 ING - .51 RC - .03 RC*ING (.45) (6.85) <sup>a</sup> (.50)	26.3	PL = .14 ING + .30 RC + .06 RC*ING (1.72) (3.75) <sup>a</sup> (.83)	11.7
<b>Not Supported</b>		<b>Not Supported</b>	
SS = -.15 AST - .47 RC - .03 RC*AST (2.09) <sup>a</sup> (6.18) <sup>a</sup> (.47)	28.6	PL = .21 AST + .25 RC + .11 RC*AST (2.58) <sup>a</sup> (3.04) <sup>a</sup> (1.38)	15.5
<b>Predictor</b>		<b>Predictor</b>	
SS = -.03 COA - .52 RC + .02 RC*COA (.36) (6.78) <sup>a</sup> (.31)	26.3	PL = .07 COA + .32 RC + .19 RC*COA (.91) (3.80) <sup>a</sup> (2.61) <sup>a</sup>	14.3
<b>Not Supported</b>		<b>Pure Moderator</b>	
SS = -.05 UPW - .52 RC - .01 RC*UPW (.67) (7.1) <sup>a</sup> (.22)	26.4	PL = .07 UPW + .32 RC + .03 RC*UPW (.89) (3.99) <sup>a</sup> (.50)	10.5
<b>Not Supported</b>		<b>Not Supported</b>	

NOTE RAT = rationality, EXC = exchange, ING = ingratiation, COA = coalition building, AST = assertiveness, UPW = upward appeal.

a  $p < .01$

b  $p < .05$

relationship (see Figure 1). As shown in column 1 of Figure 2, Hypothesis 3a was partially supported. Tests of Hypothesis 3a suggest that ingratiation, assertiveness, and upward appeal UITs moderate the role-ambiguity-to-satis-

faction-with-supervisor linkage. Standardized beta coefficients developed from the interaction terms for role ambiguity with ingratiation, upward appeal, and assertiveness UITs were all negative, indicating that role ambiguity had



a stronger negative impact on the supervisor satisfaction of those salespeople who used those three influence tactics more often. Ingratiation acts as a pure moderator on the role-ambiguity-to-supervisor-satisfaction relationship. The main effect for ingratiation on supervisor satisfaction was not significant when the moderator term was introduced. Assertiveness and upward appeal act as quasi-moderators on the relationship between role ambiguity and satisfaction with supervision. Both UITs exhibited direct and indirect negative effects on job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3b posits that UITs act as moderators on the relationship between role conflict and satisfaction with supervisor. However, analyses of the moderated regression models (column 1 in Table 4) suggest that only two of the six UITs, assertiveness and rationality, act as predictors of satisfaction with supervisor, not moderators. The findings imply that as the salesperson's use of assertiveness increases, level of satisfaction with supervisor decreases (slope coefficient =  $-.15$ ). When the salesperson's use of rationality increases, satisfaction with supervisor also increases (slope coefficient =  $+.15$ ).

Hypothesis 4a proposes that salespeople's use of UITs moderates the relationship between role ambiguity and propensity to leave. The moderator hypothesis was only partially supported. Salespeople's use of the ingratiation UIT acted as a quasi-moderator on the relationship (Table 4, column 2). The ingratiation UIT itself, as well as interaction between ingratiation and salespeople's perceptions of role ambiguity, was positively related to propensity to leave. The finding means that when a salesperson's role ambiguity increases, greater use of ingratiation as a UIT tactic increases the likelihood that the salesperson intends to leave the job. Including ingratiation, four of the six UITs were direct predictors of propensity to leave: assertiveness (slope coefficient =  $+ .26$ ), upward appeal (slope coefficient =  $+.15$ ), exchange (slope coefficient =  $+ .15$ ), and ingratiation (slope coefficient =  $+.19$ ). The findings imply that as a salesperson's use of assertiveness, upward appeal, exchange, and ingratiation increases, so does desire to leave the job.

One of the relationships hypothesized between role conflict and propensity to leave as moderated by UITs (Figure 1, Hypothesis 4b) was supported. The coalition-building UIT moderated the relationship between salespeople's perceptions of role conflict and propensity to leave (column 2 in Table 4). The moderating effect indicates that under circumstances of role conflict, the greater the salesperson's use of coalition building as a UIT, the greater the salesperson's desire to leave the job. Rather than moderating the relationship between role conflict and propensity to leave, assertiveness acts as a predictor of propensity to leave (slope coefficient =  $+ .21$ ). The finding implies that a salesperson's use of assertiveness relates positively to a propensity to leave the job.

## DISCUSSION

The study results indicate a relationship between UITs and role stress. Those salespeople who perceived higher

role ambiguity use exchange, coalition building, ingratiation, and assertiveness UITs more frequently. Salespeople who perceived higher role conflict use assertiveness, upward appeal, ingratiation, exchange, and coalition building UITs more frequently. Although these results do not directly show that salespeople's use of UITs reduces role stress, they provide initial support for this contention. Future studies should seek to validate these findings with the objective of establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between role stress and UITs.

## Research Implications

In addition to providing evidence that salespeople who perceive higher role stress use UITs more often, closer examination of the mean differences in Table 3 suggests that these differences are larger for exchange and coalition-building UITs than for other UITs across the high and low role ambiguity groups. Similarly, the mean differences are larger for assertiveness and upward appeal UITs than other UITs across the high and low role conflict groups. These observations suggest that (a) salespeople who perceive higher role ambiguity use exchange and coalition building (more subtle UITs) more frequently than do salespeople who perceive lower role ambiguity, and (b) salespeople who perceive higher role conflict use assertiveness and upward appeal UITs more frequently than do those who perceive lower role conflict. Considered in succession, the two findings suggest that under conditions of greater ambiguity, salespeople employ more subtle UITs with the sales manager (e.g., exchange), whereas under conditions of greater role conflict, salespeople employ the harder UITs (e.g., assertiveness and upward appeal).

Considered jointly, findings concerning high and low role stress and salespeople's use of UITs could well reflect a progression-oriented approach. The progression corresponds to escalation in perceived role stress. Sager (1994) provides support for the idea that salespeople's perceptions of role ambiguity contribute to perceptions of role conflict. Thereby, as role stress escalates from ambiguity to conflict, the tenor of UITs alters. Under conditions of greater role ambiguity, the salesperson is confused regarding the practices and priorities of the sales job itself. Little hostility exists concerning the sales manager, so the salesperson employs more subtle UITs to clarify job objectives. After the salesperson discerns job objectives and behaviors, role-based conflict may develop. Then, different UITs are employed. Suppose a difference arises concerning what the sales manager believes is best for the company and what the salesperson believes is best for the customer. The salesperson becomes aggravated and employs the assertive UIT. Or the salesperson uses the upward appeal UIT and goes over the sales manager's head. Certainly, the second situation inheres greater risk to the salesperson.

Study findings also demonstrate that certain UITs moderate relationships between role stressors and outcomes. Overall, it appears that salespeople's use of ingratiation, assertiveness, and upward appeal UITs under circumstances of higher perceived ambiguity could signal dissat-

isfaction with the sales manager, and a greater desire to leave the job (H3a and H4a). Conversely, salespeople's use of the rationality UIT seems unrelated to satisfaction with the sales manager.

The findings evoke ramifications for diagnosing potential problems in the areas of role clarity or avoidable turnover. Ingratiation, assertiveness, and upward appeal UITs are less desirable than the rationality UIT used by salespeople who sense less ambiguity. One might speculate that salespeople who better understand the tasks and objectives associated with the sales job (i.e., reflect lower ambiguity) do so because they employ a rationality UIT with the sales manager. However, the supposition requires developing and testing a more elaborate model that incorporates determinants of salespeople's use of the rationality UIT. Salespeople who possess poorer understanding of the objectives, priorities, or techniques of the job appear to rely on UITs other than rationality, particularly exchange and coalition building (nonconfrontive UITs).

In light of the importance of the relationship between the salesperson and the immediate manager, research attention needs to be devoted to determinants of salespeople's use of the rationality UIT. Knowledge of why salespeople employ the rationality UIT *vis-à-vis* other UITs should shed light on problem-solving approaches salespeople use to cope with role stress.

Salespeople's use of the coalition-building UIT under circumstances of higher role conflict relates positively to a desire to leave the organization (H4b). A salesperson's efforts to unite other salespeople to persuade a sales manager on a particular issue (the coalition-building UIT) betrays an intention to leave. The salesperson who develops a coalition becomes a protagonist. Resignation or withdrawal from active participation in some aspects of the job represent two possible outcomes of a failed coalition effort. From an interpretative perspective, analysts need to consider that the salesperson who employs coalition building takes a risky position in the group. If the influence effort fails, the salesperson may eventually leave the job altogether or become a chronic troublemaker. Given the latter case, a wise sales manager will delve into why the salesperson chose to use coalition building instead of rationality.

One key observation, *post hoc*, arises from review of Tables 2 and 3. Although neither hypothesized nor tested here, self-report frequencies of use for UITs suggest the existence of a hierarchy of influence tactics. Means derived from the self-report format (1 = *very infrequently* to 5 = *very frequently*) reflect a consistent pattern, in general (Table 2) and across high/low role stress groups (Table 3). In all three cases, salespeople employ the rationality UIT most frequently, followed by the ingratiation UIT. Both are softer UITs. Coalition building, assertiveness, and upward appeal (in that order) are less frequently used UITs by a substantial margin in general and across role stress groups. The exchange UIT ranks last, perhaps because the tactic is less relevant or less prevalent in the sales environment.

Keeping in mind that the salespeople were not asked to rate their use of UITs relative to one another, the pattern of means still provides insight. One possible explanation for

the pattern is that as the tenor of UITs grows more confrontational, frequency of use declines. Rationality can be considered a logical, almost laudable approach to influence. Ingratiation, although acceptable, reflects less acumen and skill than does rationality. Coalition building, although politically astute, is tainted by the specter of intrigue and underhandedness. Assertiveness connotes confrontation. Assertiveness also runs counter to the persuasive nature of the sales job. Upward appeal smacks of cowardly and unprofessional behavior and it violates chain of command. Although this interpretation is speculative, certainly a priori expectations and a research design that facilitates inference as to process would permit more exact statements. Still, the pattern of means provides insight as to how salespeople may decide on a way to influence the manager. The insights should stimulate researchers, sales managers, and sales trainers to think about how salespeople use UITs, and how salespeople can be taught to use UITs for selling. For aggressive researchers, the speculations may serve as a base for developing and testing hypotheses pertaining to use and impact of UITs by salespeople or by members of the channel of distribution.

### Utility of Findings to Sales Managers

Findings reported here countervail beliefs expressed by Kipnis and Schmidt (1985) that individuals who employ proactive tactics with superiors are more satisfied with their business lives. However, the recommendations must be considered carefully. The data inhibit inference as to causation. Whether salespeople's use of assertiveness causes intention to leave or turnover remains to be investigated. Data gathered from dyads comprising salespeople and their direct managers will facilitate more direct inference concerning how specific UITs relate to key outcome variables.

The sample of salespeople used incorporates multiple organizational contexts. Contexts may differentially affect salespeople's choice of UITs (e.g., Baum 1989; Cheng 1983). To some extent then, certain of the relationships noted in this study may be stronger than reported because organizational contexts were pooled.

From the sales manager's perspective, salespeople need to be made aware that specific UITs influence role stress differently. Managers need to make salespeople understand that although employing hard UITs such as upward appeal or coalition building appears as though it will ameliorate role conflict, use of such UITs can instead damage the relationship between salesperson and sales manager. The manager must convince the salesperson to employ a rationality perspective in negotiating. Hard UITs like assertiveness may be used only after problem-oriented UITs such as rationality are exhausted.

Findings also suggest that in the presence of high perceived ambiguity, a salesperson might best employ rational UITs to convince the manager to clarify issues. The use of soft UITs, such as ingratiation, and hard UITs, such as assertiveness and upward appeal, appears to be associated with an unfavorable relationship between the salesperson

and the immediate manager. Thereby, salespeople might be advised to avoid using ingratiation, assertiveness, and upward appeal as UITs.

Although future studies should seek to validate whether the use of UITs reduces role stress, this study shows that the frequency of the use of UITs differs between salespeople who perceive high as opposed to low role stress. More specifically, a salesperson's use of soft UITs, such as ingratiation, and hard UITs, such as coalition building and assertiveness, may signal role stress (H1 and H2). Therefore, sales managers should view a salesperson's employment of these UITs as indications of stress. A salesperson's use of UITs to control, alter, or manage a situation signifies that the salesperson has not yet succumbed to role stress by psychologically withdrawing from the situation. Therefore, opportunity exists for the sales manager to determine the source of ambiguity and conflict. Having determined the source of the stress evidenced by the UIT, the sales manager needs to communicate how the salesperson can manage, eliminate, or reduce the source of role stress.

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