

Self-directed learning: managing yourself and your working relationships

INFLUENCING

In this chapter we shall consider how you might use different styles and approaches in order to influence other people, including your boss. Being effective as a manager is not just about how you lead your own team. It's also about how you obtain the consent or buy in from people whom you do not have authority over.

Influencing may be defined as the ability to affect attitude, behaviour or outcomes. To illustrate the difference between these three aspects, you might imagine a teacher seeking to help a pupil feel more positive about staying on at school (*attitude*) or to encourage them to spend more time on homework (*behaviour*) or to help them to achieve better exam grades (*outcome*). Clearly each of the three aspects is to some extent dependent on the other two.

Some people are very good at presenting a logical case with a reasoned statement of costs and benefits. In some situations this is effective, but someone who can only work with logic will be limited in their ability to influence others. As with many other aspects of interpersonal behaviour, it is helpful to have a range of styles together with the ability to choose flexibly a style appropriate to the situation.

Influencing tactics

Here is a simple model showing seven possible tactics you could use to influence someone.

- Reason – logical presentation of ideas
- Friendliness – creation of goodwill
- Coalition – getting the support of others to back up requests
- Bargaining – negotiating
- Forcefulness – a direct approach, ordering and demanding compliance
- Higher authority – getting the support of individuals higher up in the organisational hierarchy
- Sanctions – use of rewards and punishments

You might like to consider which of these tactics you employ *frequently*, *sometimes*, *occasionally* or *never*. This may suggest some tactics that you could use more than you do at present.

Four approaches to influencing

Roger Harrison and David Berlew developed a more detailed framework based on four different approaches to influencing.

- Assertive Persuasion
- Reward and Punishment

- Participation and Trust
- Common Vision

Note that the word *Assertive* here is being used in the sense of basic assertiveness rather than the mutual, two-way notion of assertiveness that we looked at in the previous chapter. Let's consider the four approaches in turn.

Assertive Persuasion

This is the most common approach to influencing in business meetings, and is akin to the use of logical argument. It consists of presenting ideas or suggestions, and giving the reasons or facts which support this view. It also involves putting forward arguments or facts to counter opposing views. In terms of the ladder of listening that we look at in the chapter on conversations, it involves listening to disagree rather than listening to understand. It may involve asking leading questions rather than open questions.

Reward and Punishment

This approach involves the use of some combination of sticks and carrots to shape the behaviour of others. The threat of losing one's job or of failing to be promoted can be powerful incentives of the stick variety. Bonus schemes or promises of promotion are incentives of the carrot variety. The use of reward and punishment can also be the basis of bargaining between parties.

It is, of course, necessary to be in a position where you can offer such sticks and carrots. They may be common practice in some organisations - one thinks immediately of banker's bonuses – but less common in others. Moreover, the effectiveness of the approach depends on how much importance the other party attaches to the incentives.

Rewards and punishments can be psychological as well as tangible – for instance, giving praise or showing respect, on the one hand, or criticism or rejection, on the other. The use of reward and punishment can produce an unhealthy climate of threat and competition within an organisation.

Participation and Trust

This is a softer style of influencing which seeks to win the commitment of others and establish a collaborative style of working. It might be used when there is no possibility of demanding compliance or of using rewards and punishment. It might also be particularly appropriate to use this approach when it is vital to win genuine commitment.

Establishing an atmosphere of trust is likely to require giving up close control of the work of the other party. Rather, the influencer seeks other people's ideas and is willing to share responsibility with them. This approach involves listening to understand what is most important to the other, and playing back this understanding.

Common Vision

This approach seeks to focus the energies of a group on a common goal, which in some situations might be to win against a rival group. Winston Churchill's leadership of the British people in the Second World War is a vivid example of this.

The approach is potentially very powerful, but is effective in a more limited range of situations than the other styles. It seeks to draw on the values, emotions and aspirations of the group. This is more likely to be successful when the influencer is perceived genuinely to share these interests. It is unlikely to work if the influencer does not have the trust of the group.

To generate a compelling vision requires an enthusiastic painting of future possibilities which generates excitement, commitment and connection in others.

You might like to consider which of these four approaches you use and which you neglect. It may be that you reckon that there is little scope for you to use some of the styles. For example, you may have no say in the financial rewards received by colleagues.

Authority, Presence and Impact

In their book *Coaching, Mentoring and Organizational Consultancy* Peter Hawkins and Nick Smith suggest that there are three aspects of personal power and influence – authority, presence and impact.

- Your **authority** is based on your achievements. It is about what you have done in the past.
- Your **presence** is based on your ability to command respect and attention. It is about how you are now.
- Your **impact** is based on what you are able to make happen. It is about what you will change in the future.

Hawkins and Smith write that:

Authority is about our credibility. It can derive from what, or who, you know or what you have done in the past....

Presence involves creating relationship and community. It is the ability to be fully present with a quality of immediacy and to develop relationship and rapport quickly and with very different types of people...

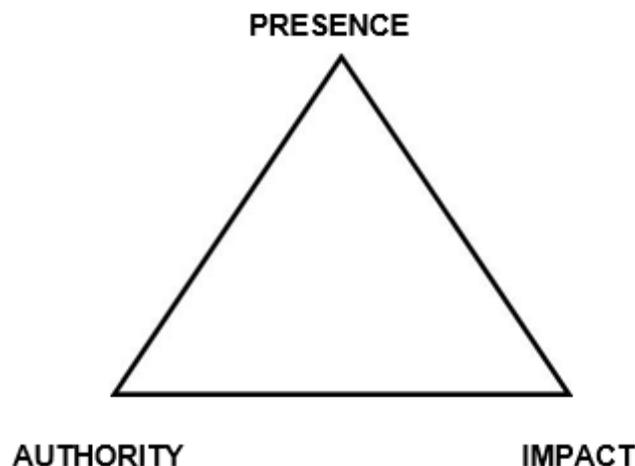
People with high levels of impact can shift the direction of a meeting, conversation or event. They have the ability to intervene in a way that shifts or reframes the way issues under discussion are being perceived and addressed..... (Hawkins and Smith, 2006)

As an oversimplified illustration – based on public perception only, it must be said - of these aspects, consider three British Prime Ministers. When he took over the premiership Gordon Brown had authority based on his earlier achievements as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Tony Blair had presence – Bill Clinton is another example of someone who could command the attention of a room. Margaret Thatcher had impact – she changed things, for instance through her privatisation programme. Note that I'm not making any political points whatsoever here about the desirability of otherwise of what each of them did.

And Nelson Mandela had all three – authority, presence and impact!

I think that authority, presence and impact are relative terms. For example, I once saw Iain Duncan Smith speak without notes for an hour, commanding the attention of five hundred people. Yet, he didn't come across to the general British public as a credible contender for Prime Minister when he was leader of the Opposition. It is often the case that people who can command attention at one level in an organisation or community aren't able to do so at a higher level of leadership.

Figure 6.1 Authority, Presence and Impact



Stakeholder analysis

A useful exercise when you embark on a project where you will need to influence others is to identify and then analyse the various stakeholders involved. A stakeholder is anyone who has a vested interest in your project or who will be affected its outcomes. Stakeholders may be within or external to your organisation.

There are various ways in which you might characterise the stakeholders and map them onto a grip such as the one shown below in Figure 6.2. This distinguishes those stakeholders who have high or low power over the decision to proceed or over the success of your project, and those who has high or low interest in your project. You need to tailor your communications and interactions differently to each group. For example:

- **High power, interested** people: these are the people you must fully engage with, and make the greatest efforts to satisfy. You may wish to actively involve these people in your plans.
- **High power, less interested** people: you need to put in enough work with these people to keep them satisfied, but not so much that they become bored with your message. You will need to address any concerns they may have.
- **Low power, interested** people: keep these people adequately informed, and talk to them to ensure that no major issues are arising. These people can often be very helpful with the detail of your project.
- **Low power, less interested** people: again, monitor these people, but do not bore them with excessive communication.

Note too that it is important to think about your stakeholders as the project develops, not just at the start. It can help from time to time to revisit you analysis, and consider the extent to which you have the key stakeholders on board and what else you need to do to communicate with or involve them.

Figure 6.2 Stakeholder mapping

High	KEEP SATISFIED	MANAGE CLOSELY
	POWER	
Low	MONITOR (Minimum effort)	KEEP INFORMED
	Low	High
	INTEREST	

Self-assessment

At the University of Warwick we use a 360 degree feedback instrument which we devised to help academics, administrators and commercial managers to develop their leadership style. One of the dimensions of the model is *Influencing*. Table 6.1 shows the eight behavioural statements which make up this dimension. You might like to consider how well you influence others by assessing yourself against these statements. You could also ask others who know you well to rate you.

There are three elements of influencing reflected in the various statements. The first is the notion that to influence others you need to build in their views and preferences into your proposals. To influence someone you need to start from where they are. People do things for reasons that they think are sensible, and their reasoning may be different to yours. And people take in information that makes sense to them, which may differ from the information which you think is important.

The second element is the idea that you have to be flexible in your approach. We looked earlier in the chapter at different tactics and approaches that you might use.

The final aspect within the statements is that it is very helpful to present your views clearly and confidently. Gravitas is a tricky concept to pin down, and we may be aware that it's lacking without necessarily being able to define what's missing.

To assess your influencing skills, indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the statements, using this five-point scale:

1. *Strongly disagree*
2. *Disagree*
3. *Neither agree nor disagree*
4. *Agree*
5. *Strongly agree*

Table 6.1 Influencing - self assessment

Consciously involves and consults key players at an early stage and builds their preferences into decisions	
Takes pains to build consensus with key stakeholders around the best way forward	
Creates highly effective working relationships with a wide range of people, particularly those in senior positions	
Uses a variety of approaches, and works convincingly with both logic and emotion, to persuade and influence others	
Generally judges effectively when to persist and when to give way	
Impresses others, particularly senior people, as someone with gravitas and sound judgement	
Says clearly, assertively and succinctly what they mean or what they want	
Presents a compelling case in both one to one and group situations, even when there is opposition to their views	

Reflecting on your own ratings and perhaps the ratings of others, you might then like to consider what you need to do differently to influence others more effectively.

Managing upwards

When I ran workshops on coaching skills for managers in the gas pipeline company Transco, a question that was often asked by one of the participants was *How do I coach my boss?* Invariably, with a little probing it became clear that what the participant really wanted was to get their boss to do what that individual wanted. As we consider in another chapter, coaching is about helping the other person to clarify their goals and work out how to achieve them. The participant didn't want to coach their boss - they wanted to influence them.

Managing your boss, or more generally managing upwards within your organisation, is one important aspect of influencing. The ideas explored earlier in the chapter apply here too. To influence your boss, you need to appreciate the world from their perspective, and you need to work out – perhaps through experience of what does and doesn't work – what styles or tactics are effective in persuading your boss to buy into your ideas.

There is one other point that is very important in managing your boss. You need to be delivering successfully on the objectives that your manager has asked you to work on. If you have a reputation with your boss as a reliable member of their team, then it will be much easier to sell your ideas to them. If, on the other hand, your manager reckons that you don't deliver, then it will be very difficult to influence them. The foundation for managing upwards is to build yourself a reputation for good performance.

In a classic Harvard Business Review article published in 1980 called *Managing Your Boss* John Gabarro and John Kotter write that, "Bosses, like everyone else, are imperfect and fallible. They don't have unlimited time, encyclopedic knowledge, or extrasensory perception; nor are they evil enemies". They suggest that to manage a "situation of mutual dependence among fallible human beings" – one way of describing the position that you and your boss are in – you need a good understanding of yourself and of your boss which you utilise to develop a healthy working relationship.

They offer the following checklist as a guide to managing your boss. Note that your "predisposition toward dependence on authority figures" in this checklist refers to how you react to the inevitable frustration you feel when your actions are constrained by the boss's decisions. Some people's natural reaction is "to resent the boss's authority and to rebel against the boss's decisions." Other people "behave in a very compliant fashion when the boss makes what they know to be a poor decision."

Make sure you understand your boss and his or her context, including:

- Goals and objectives
- Pressures
- Strengths, weaknesses, blind spots
- Preferred working style

Assess yourself and your needs, including:

- Strengths and weaknesses
- Personal style
- Predisposition toward dependence on authority figures

Develop and maintain a relationship that:

- Fits both your needs and styles
- Is characterized by mutual needs and expectations
- Keeps your boss informed
- Is based on dependability and honesty
- Selectively uses your boss's time and resources

You might like to work through the items on the checklist to identify how you could enhance how you manage your boss.