

Influencing

by Geof Cox

Influence – the process by which one person gets another to do something – is becoming increasingly important in the new structures and relationships of today's organisations. We would all like more influence. We would all like a greater range of skills to influence those people and situations that we find more difficult or problematic.

This chapter is in three parts. The first part investigates the growing need for influence skills in organisations. The second part looks at the fundamentals of power and influence and the sources of power that we can use when seeking to exert influence. The third part introduces a model to help analyse situations and plan for effective influence which will maintain or enhance the relationship between the parties as well as getting what you want.

The growing need for influence

Increasingly we need to get people who do not work for us to do things that are central to the success of our own job:

- We work in project teams where people from several different departments, and often different organisations, are brought together to complete a specific goal.
- Many of the non-core activities of organisations are outsourced, which means that we need people working in other independent organisations to do things for us.
- Organisation structures are getting flatter and more fluid, making it more difficult to identify the hierarchical authority patterns and responsibilities.
- Work is distributed according to the appropriate person rather than a job function, for example: responsibility for quality control and checking is now the responsibility of the line operator, not the quality control department.
- Empowered workers from very junior positions can take the lead on major projects and actions in the organisation.

All of these changes have caused a fundamental shift in the way things are achieved in organisations. No longer does your position in the hierarchy determine what gets done, as the responsibility for action is in the hands of the project leader or the empowered individual pursuing their own clear goals and objectives.

Even when we do have the power of the boss, we are finding that employees are not responding to traditional command and control processes. Even where they have not been formally 'empowered', today's worker is demanding more involvement and participation in decision making, especially about things that affect them and their work. Research into

motivation shows that if someone feels that they have more control and influence over their own work, then they are more likely to take an interest and improve their performance. The Business Process Re-engineers, who are redesigning the organisations of today, recognise this and try to identify processes that people can own and feel responsible for, again reducing the power and control of the traditional manager.

People are marching to a different drummer in today's organisations. Traditional command and control systems are failing - people need to be influenced to do things, not told. Everyone needs to influence others in order to complete their own jobs. Never before has the skill of influencing been more important for the future success of organisations of all sizes and functions.

Power and influence

If influence is the process by which someone gets another person to do something, power is the resource that the person uses in order to influence. An act of influence of one person on another means that the influencer has used one or more sources of power to encourage the other party to change their behaviour or to do something. Power is not always been seen as a positive force, often because of its connection with the traditional command and control structures mentioned earlier.

In these traditional hierarchies, power was invested in the relationship between the boss and subordinate, and was often experienced negatively as coercion or bullying. However, power can have a positive side, especially when we consider the power exerted by the expert individual.

The use of power in a negative way, manipulating or coercing people, tends to have a short life cycle in terms of influence. The KITA (Kick In The Ass) that Frederick Herzberg identified as one of the commonest ways of motivating staff achieves a result but needs repetition. Every time you need to implement a new approach, or to ensure that the person continues to move in the right direction, you have to deliver another kick. At the same time, the negative effects of the kicks tend to deteriorate the quality of the relationship between the two parties.

In the new forms of organisation relationships, the manager cannot afford to endanger their relationship with the other party. As we have seen, the other party may in all probability not work directly for them, so will be able to say no with far less fear of the consequences than a direct subordinate. The manager may also need to influence the same person again in the future, so it is important to ensure that the relationship between them is not compromised in any way by the current influence attempt.

The objective should be to enhance the relationship wherever possible, so that a credit balance is built up of goodwill and understanding which will make future demands more acceptable and possible. Potential influencers must therefore seek to use the sources of power they have to positive effect.

Sources of power

In the preceding section, we identified one source of legitimate power exercised by a manager – position power. This is the power that derives from the position that the person holds in the hierarchy of control and authority in an organisation. Other sources of power which give someone the ability to influence another are:

- Coercive or physical power
- Resource power
- Expert power
- Information power
- Association power
- Personal power.

Often we use several sources of power in one influence situation, some of which may be perceived in a positive way and some as negative. In the earlier example, although the manager appeared to be using the power of position in the organisation to get something done, the manner in which that power was used suggests that coercive power was also being applied. It is the use of coercion, or the threat of the use of physical power that has the negative effect on the other party.

It is therefore important to consider two points in relation to power. First of all, the power has to be recognised by the other party. If the person that you are trying to influence does not identify your source of power as important or credible, then that power is irrelevant. What influences one person may not influence another. Second, power is rarely confined to one side in a relationship. It may be very unbalanced between the two sides, but even the most downtrodden can hit back, disrupt or leave.

The ability to influence is based on the balance of power, a factor that is especially important in relationships where there is no position or coercive power - here the power balance starts out more even, often with one source of power offsetting another.

Proceeding to look at the sources of power in more detail, we can identify those which will have most positive effects in different situations, and those we can learn to use and build in order to exert more positive influence.

Coercive or physical power is the power of superior force. It is based on fear. The force does not have to be used in order to exert influence. The existence of the physical power, or at least the belief in the other party that you possess the power, is often enough. A number of relationships between nation states, both during and after the Cold War, rely on the existence or threat of coercive power to influence affairs and policies. In organisations, and in society in general, physical or coercive power is the least respected, and the one that has the most negative connotations – threatening, bullying, coercing, violence, detaining by force, dictating.

Resource power, sometimes referred to as *reward power*, is the use of valued resources as a basis for influencing others. Thus a manager may use the ability to control a pay increase or allocate interesting work to influence a subordinate. For resource power to work, the influencer must control the resource and the resource must be something the other party wants. In

essence, using resource power is exchanging what you want done for something the other party desires. As it is a form of exchange, it is not always seen in a positive light, nor popular with recipients. It can be viewed as bribery.

The use of resource power in a negative way, i.e. by restricting or removing resources, can be seen as threatening or coercive. To use resource power effectively, therefore, the influencer must understand the needs and desires of the other party, and also recognise that these will change frequently. The influencer must also balance the exchange so that the deal is seen to be balanced and not one-sided. An unbalanced deal will be tainted with feelings of manipulation and bribery which will not enhance the relationship between the parties.

Resource power is not the sole domain of the manager or boss, though their positions do bring a number of reward possibilities. Colleagues, peers and subordinates also have resource power. The finance manager has the ability to influence the board of directors to grant the funding needed by the production manager. The project leader has control of manpower and physical resources that may be of use on another project. A subordinate has control over the amount of effort and energy that she or he invests in a task that is valued by the manager.

Resources are not always physical or material - they can be the ability to influence, the granting of status, the giving of praise and recognition.

Expert power is the power that comes from the respect for someone's skill, knowledge or expertise. As it derives from the respect and acknowledgment of the power by the other party, it is seen as one of the most positive sources of power.

A specialist department or consultant, acknowledged as expert in their field, will find that their recommendations and suggestions are readily accepted. There is no need to impose further controls, kicks or sanctions in order to influence as the word of the expert is sufficient to influence.

Expert power has such a positive and lasting effect that it is a power that many aspire to and seek to claim. It is therefore a dangerous power if unjustified. Not only will a manager seriously undermine their credibility if it is found that they do not have the expertise that they claim, which will seriously affect their ability to influence in the future, but they could also undermine the credibility and influence of other departments or consultants who base their power on expertise.

Information power is the power to restrict or allow access to information which others need. It is therefore similar in its application to resource power, and is often associated with the position power of manager or boss. However, with the fragmentation of organisation structures and the growth of information and communication technology, important sources of information are now located at all levels and positions in an organisation. Information power can therefore be claimed and used effectively by a large number of people.

Association power is the access to influential people and networks both inside and outside the organisation. Often people need access to such networks or individuals to facilitate their own work, and so the connections they have is a source of power. Like information power, association power used to be the

domain of the manager or someone with position power, but now many more people act as gatekeepers and have access to this power.

Position power is the legitimate power that results from your role or position in an organisation rather than from you as an individual. This power needs to be guaranteed by someone, i.e. needs to be backed up by a higher authority which in itself is seen to be legitimate. The incumbent assumes the right to organise and carry out the requirements of that role, and in so doing uses position power.

Position power eventually falls back on coercive power or resource power if the position power is questioned, and may involve the use of association and information power in its application. As organisations revise their structures away from hierarchies, the use of position power on its own in order to exert influence is becoming increasingly rare. More often, the power to influence derives from one of the other sources as well as, or instead of, position power.

All of the sources of power are enhanced by *personal power* – charisma, popularity and personal characteristics. As the name implies, this power resides in the person, not in the position or role that the person carries out, and for this reason it is highly regarded and sought after. Like expert power it is given by the consent of those over whom it is exercised, and is therefore highly effective but fragile, needing continual nurturing and renewal.

Thus, an analysis of the sources of power available suggests that expert and personal power are the most effective for creating a positive effect. Coercive and position power are the least positive in their impact, and resource, information and association power need to be used carefully in order to create a balanced and positive outcome.

Improving personal skills in understanding the sources of power and using communication skills to enhance influence will increase personal and expert power and make people more influential. Increasing the range of methods of influence will allow people to react in a positive way to different situations and to effectively use the sources of power. The next section describes a model for analysing and applying influence methods to get what we want whilst building or maintaining the relationship between the parties.

A model for effective influencing

- ‘When push comes to shove...’
- ‘Squeeze the lemons until the pips squeak.’

Both statements are in constant use by people in organisation hierarchies to describe what method of influence they use when their first attempts do not work. The suggestion is that you escalate the pressure and resort to force or the threat of force in order to achieve your result. This is nothing more than the crude application of coercive power that, whilst it may achieve a result, is based on the end justifying the means. It is only short lived, and will have a negative effect on the relationship between the parties.

So why do managers still escalate force? The reason is an unhelpful, but natural response. When we try to change or influence another person, we are

using some form of energy – often a psychological energy, but one that is experienced similarly to physical energy.

In industrial and business organisations, the most common energy used is pushing – directing our energy against or at the other person in order to get them to move in a particular direction, stop what they are doing or change. We issue directions or instructions, give orders, ask for reports and make proposals. Most of the time this works. It is an adult communication based on persuasion and acceptance of our respective roles. But it is pushing, and when you push against something, there is bound to be resistance. When the resistance is such that the other party is not persuaded to take action – for instance, there may be strong vested interests, not enough information, or strong feelings – we then have a natural tendency to push harder, to escalate the force.

Luckily, there is a different way. You do not have to push harder to get things done or resort to threats and sanctions – you can try a different method of influencing, using a different source of power and a different energy and influence style to get what you want, and at the same time maintain your relationships or build better relationships with the people you are influencing.

The four styles and energies

When we interact with others we tend to have a preference for using one or two styles. These have been styles that we find easy to use; styles that get us results most of the time; styles that we have been taught to use through schooling and training; styles that fit the particular cultures we live and work in; styles that fit our values and beliefs.

Someone who has been brought up to think and act in a logical and rational way and is working in an organisation that is practical and systematic in its approach is likely to use a rational approach to influencing, basing their interactions on facts, rules, procedures and logical argument. By contrast, someone who has been brought up to value and care about people and works in an organisation that is based on team work, self development and respect for the worth of the individual is likely to use a more people oriented approach to influencing, interacting more with feelings and emotions and seeking to understand.

If someone has strong tendencies in these directions, they will find it difficult to communicate effectively with the other person, and find themselves incapable of adapting their style to meet the other's preference and therefore influence. On the other hand, they will work effectively with people who share their mind-set.

The more we can develop flexibility and adapt our style to meet the preference of the other party, the greater will be our capacity to influence. We will be increasing our personal power, which is one of the sources of power which is most effective.

There are two main dimensions of behaviour in communication: the degree to which we are directive, and the degree to which we are responsive. People who are directive tend to be seen as more forceful and assertive, taking control, making quick decisions and take more risks. People who are

responsive will be sensitive to, and willing to share, emotions and feelings, appear more friendly and are concerned about relationships. There are no absolutes in these two dimensions, as we are all directive and responsive to some extent, but we have a preference, a tendency to more or less, which means we can effectively break down our influence patterns into four styles (see Figure 1):

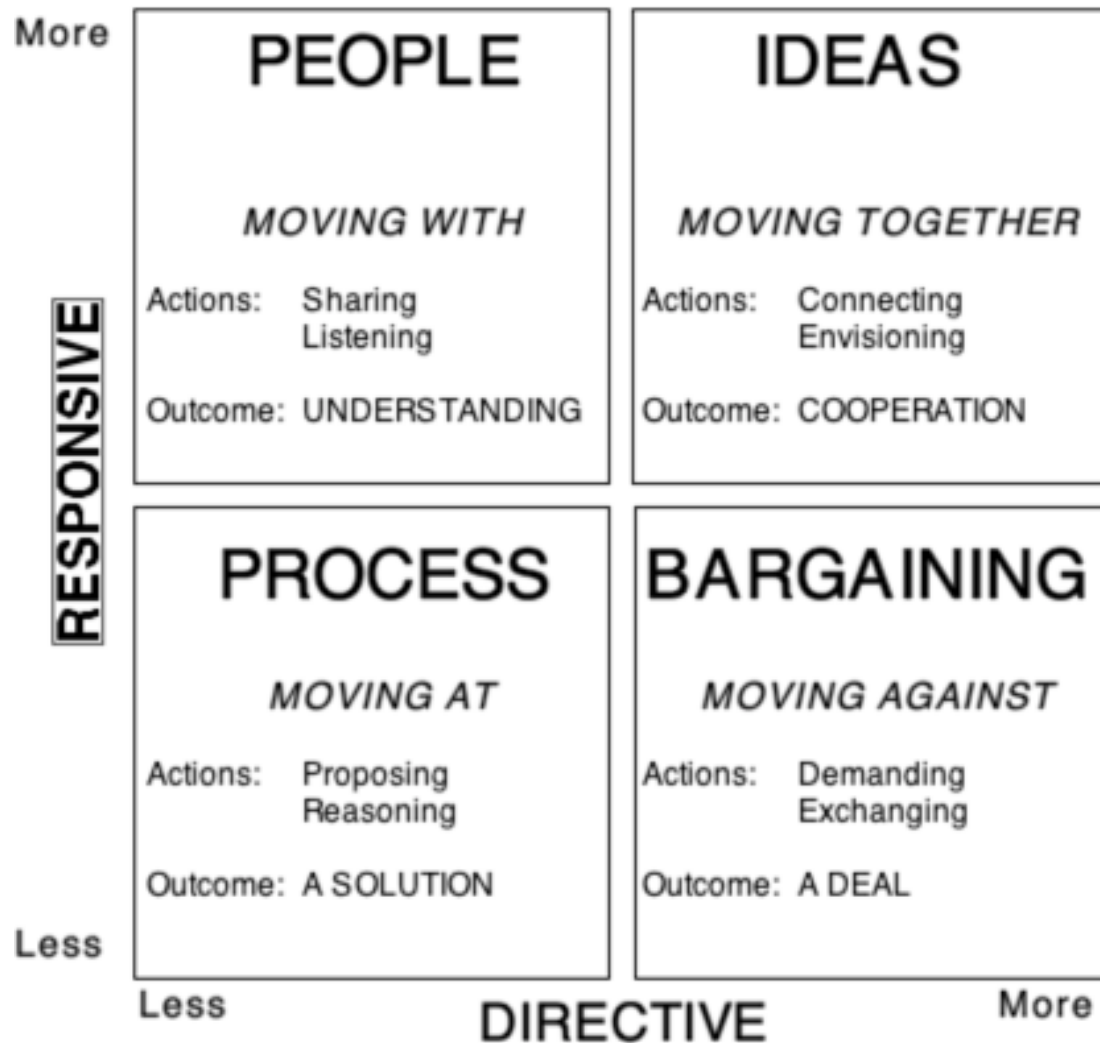


Figure 1: The four influence styles and energies

Bargaining style

Bargaining people are action-oriented, keen to get things done, decisive and direct. They use an energy that is *moving against* others, and can therefore be seen as forceful, pushy and aggressive if they overuse or misuse the approach.

Effective bargaining depends on the exchange you can make to influence someone to do something for you. The exchange can be obvious and material, based on resource, position or information power: a tip, promotion, pay increase, gifts, information.

Exchanges can also be less obvious and not material, based more on personal power: approval, status, attention, praise, inclusion, time. In a managerial position we often forget these latter options and bemoan the inability to offer worthwhile exchanges due to corporate restrictions on our individual freedom to use money. In fact these latter, psychological exchanges are often more powerful and longer lasting than material ones.

The exchange backs up the demand that we are making. It has to be something that the giver has to offer, something that the receiver desires, and something the receiver considers of sufficient value to balance the demand made. The critical point for the influencer is that it is the perception of value and balance in the eyes of the receiver which is important, not the giver's idea of what is appropriate. Thus something of low cost to the giver, like praise, can be viewed as of immense value by the receiver.

Finally, to make this approach effective, the exchange should be explicit. The implicit exchange is often assumed, and overestimated – thus a simple request for information becomes a threat of losing your job or an expectation of a reward which is not forthcoming.

Process style

Process-style people also use a pushing type of energy, but are less directive and forceful, relying more on the logical and rational nature of their argument, *moving at* the other party in order to reach a solution. Overuse or misuse of this style results in inflexible sets of rules and procedures, bureaucracy and verbosity. It is a favourite style of communication for many people and for business, especially as the first resort. To be effective, the arguments must be seen to be valid, and therefore the source of the information or power is of vital importance. Expert or personal power that is acknowledged and accepted by the receiver will be a strong foundation for this style. If, however, the power or information source is not acknowledged, or the receiver uses a different logic set, the process style will falter.

To be effective, proposals need to be clearly stated, and the reasons backing them need to be based on facts and logic geared towards the receiver, not the influencer. A strong reason for doing something from one perspective may hold no weight for the other person. Finally, as this style has a tendency toward the verbose, one needs to control the urge to continue to wear down the other party into submission through the sheer weight of argument. If preparation is done correctly, the proposal should win through on its quality, and the quality of the reasons, not on the amount of them. We often find ourselves snatching defeat from the jaws of victory by having to defend a

poorly researched piece of data or rationale which was not necessary in the first place.

Ideas style

Ideas-oriented people use their responsiveness to connect with other peoples values and beliefs and build exciting possibilities for the future. Outcomes of co-operation are achieved through *moving together* with the people they are trying to influence. This style is dependent on personal, and sometimes expert, power rather than position or resource, though the position one holds may give more of an opportunity to exercise the style, as it is one of leadership. It is a style that does not try to influence by pushing people into action, but by attracting, or pulling them.

As with all other styles, it is open to misuse, most obviously by dictators, cult leaders, politicians and some salespeople. However, used effectively, it has the power to influence large groups of people and generate enthusiasm and team spirit, often overcoming barriers and rational objections.

It is a style of particular use in introducing change, as it is the power of the future possibilities which enables us to overcome the fear of taking the first step, just like the vision of the sunny beach helps us overcome our fear of flying on holiday.

Ineffective leaders often have the vision of what they want to achieve, but do not have the responsiveness in their behaviour to build connections with their people. The vision therefore becomes an empty image, not relating to the reality or emotions of the staff, and not motivating them to change. The effective use of this style means taking time to connect with the values and beliefs of the whole group, and building exciting and attractive futures based on common ground.

People style

The people style uses listening and sharing to help people to build understanding. The energy used is *moving with*, using the energy of the other person in a positive way to develop a relationship and to influence, not to manipulate or dominate. The mindset of people orientation is characterised by a strong desire towards teamwork, synergy, communication and the needs of others. It is empathetic and sensitive. It is the only style that gathers information, so it is very useful to help find out what values and desires the other party has which can then be used as possible exchanges, reasons or connections. Like all other styles, overuse or over dependence will mean that you have difficulty interacting with others who have a different preference. At least the sensitivity which is characteristic of this style will enable you to identify such a difficulty. Learning to use alternative styles will enable you to capitalise on this awareness and allow you to adapt to others.

Conclusion

Mastering a degree of flexibility in the styles of communication, and developing a skill of recognising the preferred style of others will enhance

your personal power source and increase your influence by allowing you more choice. In order to influence effectively, the power source needs to be credible and acceptable. The more that you can build sources of expert and personal power, the more you will be using sources of power which are the most acceptable and enduring. You will also have developed alternatives to applying force, which can only work in the short term. Push need not come to shove.

Further reading

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