Influencing Skills

Defining Influence

The word influence comes from the Medieval Latin word *influentia*, stemming from the Latin word *influere*, which means “to flow.” In the late fourteenth century, an astrological connection continued with the word being defined as “streaming ethereal power from the stars acting upon character or destiny of men.” Later, in the fifteenth century, the word had evolved into a closer version of today’s definition “exercise of personal power by human beings,” and in the 1580s, the meaning became “exertion of unseen influence by persons.” As a point of reference, the term “under the influence,” as it relates to being intoxicated, first appeared in 1866!

Today, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines influence as the power or capacity of causing an effect in indirect or intangible ways. The Oxford Dictionary has a similar definition, stating that influence is the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something, or the effect itself.

John C. Maxwell, an author, speaker, and internationally recognized leadership expert is quoted as saying “leadership is influence.” Once we expand that quote, we can clearly see how important it is for managers to have the skills and expertise to be effective in eliciting the best from their employees and co-workers.

Let’s explore the myriad of ways in which managers and leaders use their influencing skills to meet corporate goals and objectives.

Influencing Styles

Managers use different influencing styles in order to persuade others to meet objectives. Some of the influencing styles we will discuss include the impact of logic, emotions, aggression, compassion, trust, and others. Researchers have dedicated a great deal of time and effort into identifying the various influencing styles of behavior. Some of the studies have resulted in quite complex listings, while others have uncovered a more simplistic approach to identifying influencing styles.

By understanding the various leadership styles of others, we can adapt our own style to either match or complement others in order to have productive and effective work environments. Issues you should consider include:

- What is your own personal style of influence?
- What is the personal style of the individual(s) that you are trying to influence?
- Will those styles work together or in conflict?
• If conflict exists, what changes should you make so that you can influence others?

**Influencing Modes**

There are two basic modes of influencing others. Within these modes, there are a wide range of approaches, tactics, and behaviors that individuals can use to accomplish one’s goals and to persuade others. The two modes are:

• **Push**—this approach is logical and aggressive with quick results. When using this mode, managers may make demands on others without considering the impact on that individual. This aggressive approach may not be well-received. As a result, employees may not be receptive or cooperative. However, when used correctly, push strategies can bring about solid results.

• **Pull**—this is all about including the individual in the decision-making process so that the person has a stake in the outcome. This usually leads to the individual wanting to accomplish the tasks set before him or her. Results are generally positive, but they may take a bit longer than in a push strategy.

All of the models we will explore include styles that fall under either the Push or the Pull strategy. As you read, take note of whether the style being discussed is a Push or Pull strategy. We will begin with some of the simpler models and move on to those that are more extensive.

**Influencing Models**

The influencing models we will look at now are illustrated in following quote by Albert Einstein: “…as social beings, we are moved in the relations with our fellow beings by such feelings as sympathy, pride, hate, need for power, pity, and so on.”

The first model is based on the work of R. W. Wallen, a clinical psychologist. This model says that there are three different types of executive personalities. They are:

• Tough Battler
• Friendly Helper
• Logical Thinker

The **Tough Battler** strives to win through assertion of power and sees the world as one of conflict. This person is committed and has drive and energy. This person leads by giving orders or threats and by posing challenges. People generally do not like to work with a person who employs this style.
The Friendly Helper, on the other hand, leads by creating an environment of cooperation, openness, trust. This person seeks to develop effective relationships. The Friendly Helper views the world as one of love, helpfulness, and sympathy. This personality type leads by making friends, exchanging favors, and treating everyone equally. Here, we might consider quoting George Eliot: “Blessed is the influence of one true, loving human soul on another.”

The last personality type in this model is the Logical Thinker. This personality type is calm and organized. This person uses logic and debate to convince others. This person is focused on facts and information as well as views the world as one of logic and knowledge. The Logical Thinker leads by using facts, details, and a regimented approach to influence others.

Two other simple models each identify five influencing styles. The first model, described by Chris Musselwhite and Tammie Plouffe in the Harvard Business Review, includes:

1. **Rationalizing**—using facts, logic, and your past experience to persuade
2. **Asserting**—using an aggressive approach and pressure to convince others
3. **Negotiating**—using compromise and cooperation to achieve your goals
4. **Inspiring**—(an inclusive approaching) using stories and emotional appeals to create cooperation
5. **Bridging**—(a team-building approach) getting others to work together to achieve your goal

The second model that identifies five characteristics is very similar to the other styles we have addressed but uses a more basic way of identifying each style. This model, identified by Larry Reynolds, includes:

1. **Tell**—this is much like the Tough Battler personality type we looked at in our first model. Here, the leader uses his or her power and authority to communicate what is to be done. The result is generally negative, because the manager is seen as overbearing and a dictator.
2. **Sell**—this style is much like the style of “relationship selling” a salesperson might use. In this approach, the seller would find out what the needs and desires are of his “customer” and meet those needs. Results are generally positive as this is a win-win approach.
3. **Negotiate**—as stated in the model above, negotiating is all about making deals, trades, and bargains to accomplish your goals.
4. **Problem solve**—this is much like the “bridging” style in the previous model. A leader will create a common problem that can be solved by all parties working together toward a solution.
5. **Coach/facilitate**—this style enables individuals to provide their own solutions to their issues and situation. They come to “own” the problem and will generally work hard to find a solution.

In addition to these models, there are many other models that become more complex and extensive. These various models and influencing styles can become valuable as managers encounter more varied personalities, face intricate and challenging situations, as well as grow both personally and professionally. By having knowledge of the numerous ways of influencing others, managers can adapt, change, and tailor their style for each situation and event they encounter. We will now look at some other influencing skills that can be incorporated into the basic characteristics we have already explored.

*Types of Influencing Skills*

**Positive Behavior**

By demonstrating good behavior, we can influence the behavior of others. The following quote by John Locke exemplifies this idea: “We are like chameleons, we take our hue and the color of our moral character, from those who are around us.”

Employees can see how a manager reacts in stressful or challenging situations. How a leader responds to difficult or aggressive people will give employees an example to emulate. Additionally, the ways in which a manager demonstrates his or her commitment to ethics, values, and corporate tenets can motivate employees to do the same.

Some of the behaviors we exhibit include developing good relationships with others and speaking to others with respect. Maintaining eye contact and being aware of the messages that our body language communicates can enhance our image while presenting a good example for others. Additionally, our tone of voice and the words we use will show how we feel about those with whom we come into contact. These actions can be very inspiring and can result in our enhanced ability to influence others, as needed.

**Rules and Regulations**

Some styles of influence include illustrating the need for strict adherence to the rules, regulations, standards, codes of conduct, etc. that are part of the organization’s culture, philosophy, climate, or legal requirements. The consequences of not following these guidelines can be financial losses, legal action, safety risks, and so on. The approach of strictly following rules and regulations should only be used when there are legitimate reasons for doing so, and when issues of safety and health are concerned.
Listening

Hearing is a physiological function. Listening is the process of understanding what we hear. How many of us practice “active listening?” When others speak to us, are we giving them our full attention? Do our minds wander? Are we thinking about our next task or what we are having for lunch? Or, are we giving the speaker our full attention so that we are engaged in the conversation?

Here’s a quick experiment in “active listening:” sit in a room where you will not be disturbed. You can do this at home or at work. Turn off the phone. Have a pencil and paper at hand so you can take notes. Set a stop watch for 3 minutes and simply listen to the sounds around you. First, listen to the sounds in the room. Then, listen to the sounds outside the room; finally, listen to the sounds outside the building. Write down everything you hear.

Were you surprised at what you heard? Does it make you more aware of your surroundings? Now, imagine how much more information you will gain by giving those around you the same focused attention when they speak.

Effective leaders understand how good listening skills can enhance their ability to influence others. They are also able to analyze and process what they hear, while also observing body language and facial expressions.

Verbal Skills

When we seek to influence or persuade others, the words we choose and the ways in which we use those words are vital to success. Also, our ability to visualize the expected results can be effective in motivating others to carry out their required tasks.

Persona

Are we active, full of energy, vibrant, patience, courageous, or self-aware? As we display our personalities, our ability to influence others becomes enhanced or decreased. Exhibiting confidence and consistency are also strong influencing powers. Employees also want consistency, so they know what to expect from their leaders. Additionally, an effective influencer can use harm and personal magnetism as a means of persuading others. Of course, this should always be done sincerely and when appropriate. If an individual feels that his or her manager is being disingenuous, then trust and confidence will be lost.

In Conclusion

The ability to influence others is a constantly evolving process. Business situations change, the people with whom we come into contact change, and we change as we mature and grow. As Machiavelli states, “Whoever desires constant success must change his conduct with the times.”
By understanding our individual influencing styles, we will be able to engage others so that corporate objectives can be met. Understanding the ways in which others are influenced and can be influenced will enable us to adapt our styles for maximum productivity and satisfaction. Building relationships, developing new ways of interacting, and exploring new styles will bring about cooperation and successful outcomes.

Summary:

- Influence is defined as the power or capacity of causing an effect in indirect or intangible ways.

- There are a wide range of influencing skills that managers and leaders use to meet corporate goals and objectives.

- The two modes of influence are Push and Pull. All influencing skills come under one of these headings.

- Push skills are a more aggressive approach and may bring quick results.

- Pull strategies seek to motivate others and create an environment of cooperation and teamwork.

- Understanding one’s personal influencing skill set is essential to corporate success. Understanding what motivates others, being able to adapt to their individual personalities, and changing one’s style of influence is also essential to productivity and success.

- Styles of influence include logic, assertiveness, salesmanship, negotiation, and problem-solving approaches.

- Additional skills needed to enhance influence effectiveness include honesty, compassion, and the ability to encourage others to do their best.

- Charisma, good verbal skills, and the ability to interpret body language are additional skills that can be incorporated into one’s influencing style.

- Exhibiting positive behavior, following corporate guidelines, and having self-awareness balance out the influencing skills a manager or team-leader should possess.
• Understanding our individual influencing styles and adapting our styles to the ways in which others are influenced will enable us to engage others so that corporate objectives can be met.