

Influencing Skills

Defining Influence

The Oxford Dictionary defines influence as “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 requisite skills and expertise that will elicit the best performances and project outcomes 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 a variety of different tactics meant to persuade others to actively pursue and achieve targeted objectives. Researchers have dedicated a great deal of time and effort into identifying the various influencing styles of behavior. Several major studies have produced complex, multi-faceted definitions for distinguishing these categories, while others employ a more simplistic approach for identifying influencing styles.

By understanding the various leadership styles used by our bosses, colleagues, and employees, we can more easily adapt our own style to either match, or complement others in order to promote a more productive and effective work environment. You should consider the following questions when attempting to meld your style to that of others in your organization:

- 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 compliment each other, or will they likely lead to conflict?
- If conflict exists, what changes should you make so that you can better influence others?

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Influencing Methods

There are two key methods that can be used to influence others. Within both categories, there are a wide range of approaches, tactics, and behaviors that individuals can use to successfully persuade others. The two overarching methods used to influence subordinates and teammates in the workplace are:

- **The Push Method** – this approach is logical and aggressive with quick results. When using this method, managers may make demands on employees without considering the immediate or long-term impacts on specific individuals. 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.
- **The Pull Method** – this approach is all about including the individual in the decision-making process so that the person has a stake in the eventual outcomes. This method usually leads to a proactive response, in which the individual is more likely to fully accomplish the tasks set forth. Results from this approach are generally positive, but may take a bit longer to come to fruition in comparison to those achieved by means of the Push Method approach.

All of the following influence models fall under either the Push or Pull Methods previously outlined. As you read, take note of whether the style being discussed uses a Push or Pull approach. We will begin with some of the simpler models and move on to those that are more complex.

Influencing Models

The following influencing models are perfectly exemplified in this quote from 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 that we will closely examine is based on the work of R. W. Wallen, a clinical psychologist. This model suggests that there are three different types of executive personalities. They are:

- **Tough Battler**
- **Friendly Helper**

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- **Logical Thinker**

The *Tough Battler* strives to achieve results through an open assertion of power, and sees the world as one of conflict and casualties. This person is very committed to their work and has a high level of drive and energy. This type of individual leads by posing challenges and giving strict orders – at times they may resort to threats if quick outcomes are not readily apparent. People generally do not like to work with a person who employs this influence style.

The *Friendly Helper*, on the other hand, leads by creating an environment of cooperation, openness, and trust. This person seeks to develop effective relationships. They typically will view their personal leadership role as one of nurturing, 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 tends to be very calm and well organized. This person often uses logic and debate to convince others and build loyalty within their workgroup. They lead by using facts, details, and a regimented approach in order to influence others.

Two additional models commonly used by business professionals each identify five distinct 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

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The following model also identifies five characteristics of influence 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 dictatorial.
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 attempt to meet those needs. Results are generally positive as this tends to be 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 as issues and new projects arise. They come to “own” the problem and will generally work diligently to find a solution.

Understanding the various classification models and identification methodologies outlined above can be an extremely valuable managerial tool as you come to encounter diverse personalities and challenging situations in your workplace environment. After coming to understand how you fit into one, or maybe even several of these categories, you will grow significantly as both an employee and a leader. By having knowledge of the numerous ways of influencing others, managers can adapt, change, and tailor their style for every situation and event that they might encounter. We will now take a look at some of the other influencing skills that can be incorporated into the basic models that we have already explored.

Types of Influencing Skills

Positive Behavior

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By demonstrating positive behavior, we can directly influence the actions 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 frequently observe how their managers react in stressful and challenging situations. How a leader responds to difficult or aggressive people will provide employees with an example to emulate – therefore it is essential that you always conduct yourself in a professional and polite manner. The ways in which a manager demonstrates his or her commitment to ethics, values, and corporate tenets will motivate employees do the same.

We should always work towards developing good professional relationships and addressing others with kindness, dignity, and respect. Maintaining eye contact and being aware of the messages that your body language conveys can enhance your professional image while presenting a good example for others to follow. Your tone of voice and the words that you choose to use will show how you feel about those with whom you come into contact.

Rules and Regulations

At certain times you may want to illustrate the need for adherence to the rules, regulations, standards, and codes of conduct 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. Although these rules provide a general framework to build upon, continuous efforts to enforce adherence may alienate some of your employees and coworkers. Excessively strict rules and regulations should only be used when there are legitimate reasons for doing so, or 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 actually 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

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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 start to absorb by giving those around you the same focused attention when they speak.

Effective leaders understand how active 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 frame our conversations are vital to success. Our ability to verbally illustrate expected outcomes can be very effective in motivating others to carry out their required tasks.

Persona

Are we active, full of energy, vibrant, patient, courageous, or self-aware? As we display our personalities, our ability to influence others may become either enhanced or decreased depending on our how we are perceived. Exhibiting confidence and consistency are also strong influencing powers that will allow you to become an exemplar of positivity and success.

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 your individual influencing style, you will be better equipped to engage with others so that corporate objectives can be met. Understanding the ways in which others respond to your efforts will enable you to adapt your style for maximum productivity and employee morale. Building professional relationships and exploring new approaches for influencing others will also greatly enhance the level of cooperation in your business environment.

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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 models 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 a good self-awareness will greatly impact your ability to influence others.
- Understanding your individual influencing style and adapting your style to the ways in which others are influenced will enable you to actively engage with others so that corporate objectives can be met.

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