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Influence: The Essence of Leadership

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Mastering the art of influence is a key leadership component. Successful leaders skillfully use different tactics under different situations to change behaviors, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs and/or values.

What is Influence?

To be an effective leader, it is necessary to influence others to support and implement decisions that the leader and group members perceive are necessary. Without influence, leadership does not occur. In other words, leadership is the act of influencing outcomes.

Influence can be with people, things or events. Strength and effectiveness of influence can vary. The process the leader uses to influence someone can take a variety of forms.

Influence is defined as "a force one person (the agent) exerts on someone else (the target) to induce a change in the target, including changes in behaviors, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs and values" and "the ability to affect the behavior of others in a particular direction." To influence, a leader uses strategies or tactics, actual behaviors designed to change another person's attitudes, beliefs, values or actions.

How Does An Influence Tactic Work?

Leaders tend to use different tactics and to have somewhat different objectives depending on the direction of the influence. For instance, this typically can be seen when a leader attempts to influence someone above them or below them.

An important reason for choosing a specific influence tactic may depend on what the leader wishes to accomplish. For example, a manager in an organization may want to influence employees to:

- Modify their plans and schedules
- Approve and support manager plans and proposals
- Accept and carry out new assignments
- Provide relevant and timely information
- Discontinue inappropriate behavior

In a community or volunteer setting, a leader may wish to influence participants to:

- Increase their commitment toward a goal
- Influence the outcome of a decision
- Increase pressure to get something done
- Gain support for a specific project

Types of Influence Tactics

The **Power Use Model** predicts someone's choice of influence tactics in terms of its "softness" versus "hardness." This dimension is defined in terms of how much freedom a tactic leaves the person to decide either to yield or to resist the influence attempt: Hard tactics leave individuals less freedom than soft tactics. Hard tactics include "exchange," "legitimating," "pressure," "assertiveness," "upward appeal" and "coalitions." These behaviors are perceived as more forceful and push the person to comply. Soft tactics, on the other hand, are influence behaviors which are considered thoughtful and constructive. Soft tactics include "personal appeal," "consultation," "inspirational appeal," "ingratiation" and "rational persuasion."

Soft tactics allow the person to be influenced with more latitude in deciding whether or not to accept the influence than do hard tactics. Hard influence tactics can place more strain on the relationship between the influencing person and the target, especially when the action was unwarranted.

Influence tactics can also be divided into "push" and "pull" tactics. Both categories can get results. Push tactics tend to get short-term results, while pull tactics garner support rather than compliance.

Researchers disagree over the exact number of tactics. However, the following table gives a definition for the most common tactics and the effectiveness of their use.

Outcomes of Influence Attempts

The success of any influence attempt is defined in terms of the response of the follower or object of the influence effort. There are three possible outcomes of influence attempts:

Tactic	Definition	Effectiveness
Pressure	Behavior includes demands, threats or intimidation to convince others to comply with a request or to support a proposal.	Low
Assertiveness	Behavior includes repeatedly making requests, setting timelines for project completion or expressing anger toward individuals who do not meet expectations.	Low
Legitimating	Behavior seeks to persuade others that the request is something they should comply with given their situation or position.	Low
Coalition	Behavior seeks the aid of others to persuade them to do something or uses the support of others as an argument for them to agree.	Low
Exchange	Behavior makes explicit or implicit a promise that others will receive rewards or tangible benefits if they comply with a request or reminds others of a favor that should be reciprocated.	Moderate
Upward Appeals	Behavior seeks the approval/acceptance of those in higher positions within the organization prior to making a request of someone.	Moderate
Ingratiating	Behavior seeks to get others in a good mood or to think favorably of them before asking them to do something.	Moderate
Rational Persuasion	Behavior uses logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade others that a proposal or request is viable and likely to result in task objectives.	Moderate
Personal Appeals	Behavior seeks others' compliance to their request by asking a "special favor for them," or relying on interpersonal relationships to influence their behavior.	Moderate
Inspirational Appeals	Behavior makes an emotional request or proposal that arouses enthusiasm by appealing to other's values and ideals, or by increasing their confidence that they can succeed.	High
Consultation	Behavior seeks others' participation in making a decision or planning how to implement a proposed policy, strategy or change.	High

1. *Resistance:* The person you are trying to influence resists your efforts to influence his or her behavior and either avoids, ignores or actively resists your efforts at influence. This resistance can take several forms, which may include the following:

   - Refuse outright to agree to your attempts to influence them.
   - Ignore your efforts at influence.
   - Make excuses why they cannot do what you want.
   - Ask higher authorities to overrule your request.
   - Attempt to persuade you to withdraw your attempt at influence.
   - Delay acting on your influence efforts.
   - Make a pretense of complying while actively attempting to sabotage your efforts.

2. *Compliance:* The person you are trying to influence accepts your influence attempt, but apathetically or unenthusiastically. When the response to your influence attempt can be described as compliance, it is likely you have been successful in influencing the behavior, but not the attitudes of your influence target.

3. *Commitment:* The object of your influence attempt agrees with your decision or influence effort and makes an enthusiastic, voluntary effort to do what you have asked. The response comes not because the person has to but because he or she wants to.

Examples of the Effective Use of Influence

Here are three scenarios in which influence could be used. For each situation, ask the following questions:

1. What influence tactic would be the most effective?
2. What influence tactic would be the least effective?
3. What is the objective of the influence?

Situation #1: You have heard several accounts from reliable sources that one of your top performers in your department has been sexually harassing a coworker. You would hate to

lose this employee, but you strongly disapprove of people who abuse their power. You want the behavior stopped before the company is slapped with a lawsuit.

Rational persuasion and pressure are the most effective in this particular situation. This is an example where a soft or pull tactic would be ineffective. This situation does not allow for the individual to have a choice. Action is needed now. The objective of the influence is to stop the behavior.

Situation #2: You are concerned that the other managers in your somewhat conservative company have not completely grasped the need to be more competitive. Even though the firm's profit and loss statement and other statistics have been slipping steadily, most of them do not yet perceive a need for change. You want to encourage them to implement a Total Quality program.

The objective in this scenario is to influence the employees to see the need for increased motivation for improved economic gain. Personal and inspirational appeals could provide the greatest effect as these create long-term behavior change. Hard or push tactics would be the least effective, and could lead to a further decline in motivation.

Situation #3: You are the chairperson of the Administrative Council for your local community organization. Looking at the end of year financial report, you realize that the budget must be increased by $5,000 to meet an increase in insurance premiums. You must address the entire membership to influence increased monetary giving.

Increased financial giving is the objective of this influence. Rational persuasion and inspirational appeals could serve to influence the membership of the benefits of the increased monetary needs. Hard or push tactics would be the least effective. It could anger the members into not providing any financial help.

Conclusions

People who aim for a positive group outcome need to diagnose the situation and determine if a hard/push tactic or a soft/pull tactic would be appropriate. Mastering the art of influence is a key leadership component. A successful leader will understand what influence tactic works best for the situation and the person or group. If the desired results aren't obtained, perhaps the wrong tactic is being used. Effective leadership and influence has available a wide array of tactics. Too often potential leaders use the same tactic over and over, getting few results because the tactic was applied inappropriately. If ideas are to be accepted toward a given change, leaders must learn the art of influence.

Resources

For more information on influence tactics check any of the following publications:

Barbuto, J. and Scholl, R. (1999). Leaders' motivation and perception of followers' motivation as predictors of influence tactics used. *Psychological Reports*, 84, 1087-1098.

French, J.P.R. and Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in social power* (7th ed.). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research.

Fritz, S., Brown, W., Lunde, J. and Banset, E. (1999). *Interpersonal skills for leadership* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hughes, R., Ginnett, R. and Curphy, G. (1995). Power, influence and influence tactics. In *The Leader's Companion*., J. Thomas Wren. New York, NY.: The Free Press.

Kipnis, D. (1976). *The powerholders*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Yukl, G.A. (1998). *Leadership in organizations* (4th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Yukl, G. and Falbe, C. (1990) Influence tactics and objectives in upward, downward and lateral influence attempts. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75, 132-140.

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