



Developing impact and influence

Richard Hale outlines the key factors involved in developing impact and influence capabilities

The development of impact and influence skills in members of staff is becoming increasingly important to major organisations, both to support formal development programmes and personal coaching. For trainers and consultants, being able to influence others will be increasingly important in the future. In this article, eight key influencing factors will be explored.

Now, more than ever, the personal skills of impact and influence are critical to success if you are working in the business or corporate environment. Many factors have converged to make this true:

- The increasing value of the role of an 'expert', who may not have formal position-based power
- The increase in partnership and outsourcing relationships
- The growth of internal service centres
- The acceptance of the internal customer/supplier concept
- The reduction in the shelf life of knowledge
- The recognition that professional relationships require more than just professional skills to influence clients and colleagues.

Whilst most people work in roles in departments and organisations that can be explained in rational terms, they nonetheless have to achieve results in a social, emotional and often irrational environment. Psychology, social psychology and the dynamics of human politics are just as important as technical ability.

Organisations are increasingly driving towards rationality through means that include outsourcing, refining of systems, scaling-up, and seeking economies of scale. This creates a need for highly skilled, confident individuals who can navigate the political and social environment, drawing on their personal and inter-personal skills as much as their professional competencies.

The impact and influence programme

Since the early 1990s, I have been involved in the development and delivery of a programme designed to develop the skills of impact and influence. This programme has brought together senior executives and specialists from several major global corporations.

Many mid-career executives in the programme had reached a glass ceiling in their career: subject mat-

ter expertise had taken them so far, but they were being held back through their inability to influence others effectively, and to manage politics and confrontation.

Technical competence was no longer enough, and many of them were angry and frustrated, not understanding why the professional and technical skills they had developed over the years (and which were previously a passport to success) were no longer helping them get to the top. Many of the organisations sponsoring these managers on the programme expected that a course would be the answer and would change them overnight.

I came to realise that there was a need to tackle personal development and learning at all levels in the model of work-based learning and change (*see Figure 1*).

Some managers attending these programmes were surprised to find that the key concepts they were being exposed to weren't new to them. They had knowledge of the basic skills of influencing. Having the knowledge, however, is not the same as applying them in real situations, so the challenge was to help people move beyond the second level in the hierarchy: that is, to move from knowledge into action.

For instance, someone might know that creating rapport is key to building relationships and a foundation for influencing others, but knowing this does not mean they have the skills of rapport-building. We introduced 'real plays' as a means of practising the skills and providing feedback against these skills areas as shown in the Circle of Influence (see Figure 2).

Managers bring real situations where they need to influence others to the programme and describe them to a partner who acts as the person they need to influence in the real work situation.

Ninety-nine per cent of participants, when surveyed at the end of the programme, were motivated to sustain the change in their real world situation by practising the skills they had learned on the programme. We had helped them move to the third level in the hierarchy, but this wasn't enough.

In our early research we found that after a year, only six per cent of participants had managed to sustain the change in real world situations. In order to effect change at the highest level of action, we needed to introduce two dimensions to the programme: cognitive awareness and work-based action learning.

Despite the focus on skills and competencies in the world of management training, our research into the qualities of successful influencers showed that skills and competencies were only part of the formula.

The most successful influencers managed their cognitive or thinking processes. This included, for

Model of Work-Based Learning & Change



Figure 1

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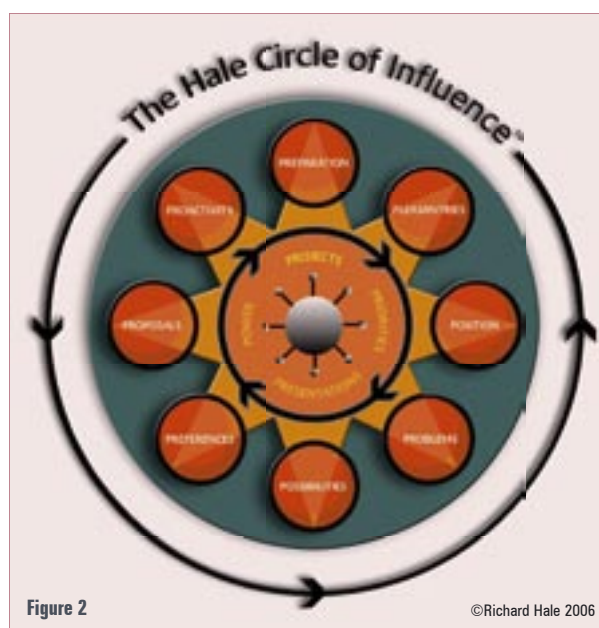


Figure 2

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instance, controlling their self-talk ahead of and during stressful situations, such as when chairing a difficult meeting or confronting an awkward individual.

Rather than becoming trapped in a cycle of negative self-talk ('This is going to be difficult – I am not too good in this sort of high-profile situation'), they would use positive self-talk ('This will be challenging but I rise to challenges well and I am going to learn from this').

We introduced techniques for the development of cognitive awareness and management of

thinking into the programme, on the basis that thinking affects feelings, which in turn affects behaviour. We were helping people to confront their own self-image and the beliefs they held about their capability and comfort zones they had built around themselves.

The other dimension we introduced was a work-based action learning focus. Rather than positioning the programme as one where the participants would be 'taught' the skills of influence, we required participants to come to the programme with real issues they wanted to tackle in the workplace.

The workshop or course part of the programme is just the start: participants have to then take action in the workplace and demonstrate a return on investment. They are supported by each other and by facilitators in a learning-set environment.

A key mantra of the programme is 'You cannot influence what you do not understand', and this led me to research the importance of values in the influencing context. The research showed that relationships break down particularly where there is a lack of sensitivity to differences in personal value and beliefs.¹ This led to exercises and tools to help in the identification of personal values within oneself and others.

The results of these developments in the evolution of the programme have been well documented. In one example of the programme's effectiveness, it enabled a participant in the tough environment of the building industry to save over a million pounds through the implementation of newly acquired influencing skills.

The programme has since been used by organisations such as Lloyds TSB, HBOS, Royal Sun Alliance and BWB Consulting, and it is now available to organisations and individuals through a national and international accreditation network.

Trainer Questions...

- To what extent do you help participants address their cognitive processes as well as skills?
- Who takes the responsibility for effecting change? Do you let participants push the onus onto you or do you push it on them?
- Do you measure the effectiveness of training and development at all four levels in the Model of Work-Based Learning and Change?²

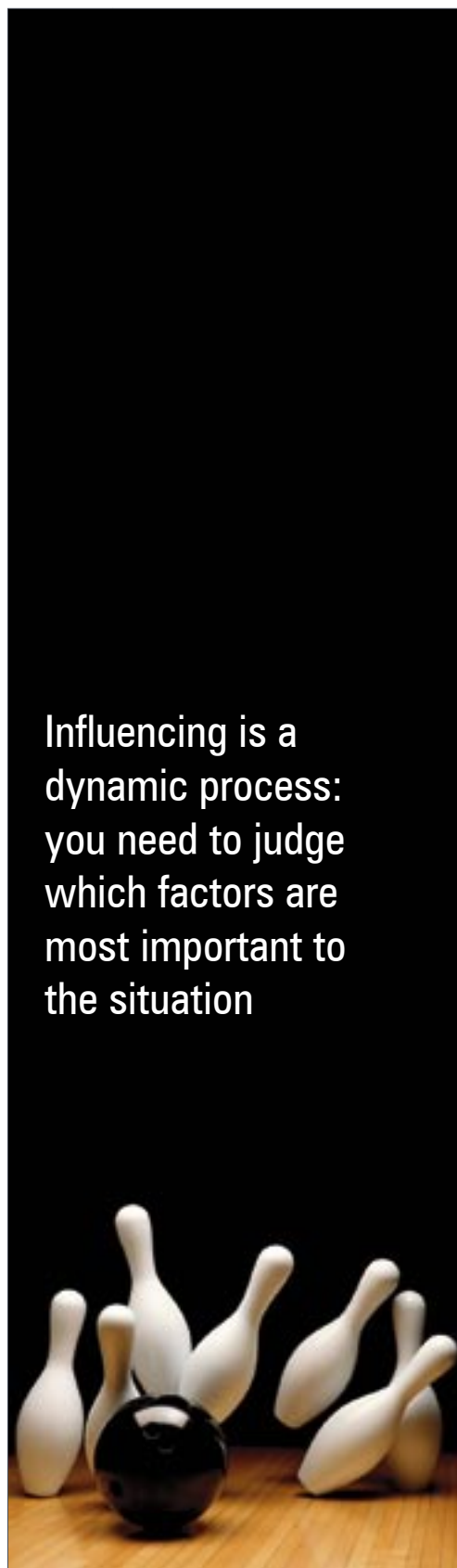
The Circle of Influence

The *Circle of Influence* has been developed through identification of the key factors of importance when seeking to influence others. The model has been refined over the past 10 years, based on a combination of research and practical experience in delivery of the programme.

This can be used as a template to help in preparing to influence others and to provide a structure for reviewing personal effectiveness. Some individuals may find there are some factors in the circle where they have natural strengths, or areas requiring development, which might be addressed through the formal programme or through personal coaching.

However, each influencing situation we face is circumstantial. It would be simplistic to suggest there is a sequential formula to follow or that a certain personality type is required. Influencing is a dynamic process and you need to judge which factors are most important in a specific meeting or situation.

I have developed a support tool which can help in this respect. The *Preparing for Impact & Influence* questionnaire (PIIQ) is completed ahead of an influencing situation and requires you to consider the style of the person you are seeking to influence as well as the eight key factors in the circle. Analysis of the questionnaire leads to guidance notes to help you prepare for an effective influencing encounter.



Influencing is a dynamic process: you need to judge which factors are most important to the situation

So what are the key factors?

Preparation – is most often neglected but can be one of the most powerful factors when seeking to influence others. Examples of associated skills are intelligence-gathering as well as effective personal mental preparation.

Pleasantries – encompasses rapport-building and the management of impressions. It is commonly associated with the start of the influencing process but is key throughout.

Position – is about reaching a common understanding of the current situation or position through a shared discussion. A common error here is failure to engage the other person in discussion from their perspective.

Problems – in coming to agreement about the problems associated with the current situation you start to build a case for change. Again, here it is important to develop an understanding and agreement regarding the problems collaboratively, rather than to assume the other person sees things in the same way as you.

Possibilities – rather than locking onto one solution and driving hard for that, the more you can negotiate around a range of possibilities, the more likely you will be to create a sense of joint decision-making.

Preferences – by explaining your preferred course of action you are moving towards the proposals stage, where you seek to gain agreement on specific action that should be taken.

Proposals – At some point in the process of influencing you need to move beyond the discussion of possibilities and preferences, and into shaping the actual proposal for action. You need to show the

ability to be assertive in stating what you want and should try to build the proposals collaboratively with the other person. Skills of persuasion may be required, and this may mean appealing both to logic and emotion.

Additionally, you will need to show the ability to develop realistic action plans. Sometimes the proposal is just to the other person you are influencing, but more often than not there are other people who need to be persuaded by the proposals you develop. Consider who else needs to be influenced, and develop your proposals considering their perspective.

Adaptability – this is critical in terms of being able to adapt one's style of influencing to the style of others. It means adapting to both the situation and the personal preferences (and arguably values) of the person you seek to influence.

Proactivity – It is no good doing any of the above things if you do not gain a commitment to proactive positive action. Influencing means leading the other person to take action, and the danger is that you waste a lot of time in meetings discussing issues, but nothing happens afterwards.

This means that influencing continues after the meeting and you will need to follow up to see that action is taken. In meetings you may want to ask the other person to summarise what they are going to do, so you can judge the level of commitment and understanding.

Clearly the skills of impact and influence are related to emotional intelligence (EI). Petrides, Furnham and Frederickson³ conducted content analysis in order to identify 15 components common to the key emotional intelligence models.

Below, I have selected the components that I consider to be of particular relevance to EI in the context of influencing.

Emotional perception

I would agree that successful influencers are those who can communicate their feelings to others, recognise the emotions of others and control their own emotions. Many managers today have been brought up through their organisations to believe that emotions are 'soft' and irrelevant to the tough world of business. I have even heard it said by one manager, 'We don't do emotions round here'!

This attitude is thankfully changing, due to the increasing evidence that strong emotional intelligence can make the difference between success and failure, particularly when all things are equal technically.

Influencing is about more than individual psychology alone; it is about social psychology

Successful influencers are able to move communication beyond transactional exchanges related to the project or technical agenda. They can access the emotional energy of the other person and convey their own emotions in a positive way.

Petrides *et al* explore the challenges of developing valid instrumentation to assess objectively EI ability, noting the inherently subjective nature of emotional experience.

Additionally, I would argue that influencing is about more than individual psychology alone; it is about social psychology. Most of the EI instruments focus on assessment and use individual self-reporting, rather than addressing the real-world, situational nature of influencing.

The personality and style of the other person are key considerations

when you are seeking to influence, so you need to adapt accordingly.

The situation you are discussing is another variable that will inevitably have an effect on the other person's frame of mind. It is for this reason that I have sought not to develop a tool that attempts to assess influencing capability, but one that can be used to provide guidance on how to have impact and influence in real situations.

Summary

Clearly the need to demonstrate effective impact and influence skills will continue to be a determinant of personal success in the social and political environment of the working organisation.

The skills required can be seen as related to EI, but in addition to this, there is also a need to find a practical way of bringing the constructs of EI alive, beyond any attempts at ability-measurement and psychometric assessment. Furthermore, influencing is actually a matter of social psychology, and not simply a matter of psychology alone. ■

References

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Dr Richard Hale is an author and co-founder of Value Projects, specialists and publishers in the field of work-based learning. He is interested in linking business impact and learning and has developed accreditation programmes recognised by UK universities, based on the application of learning in the workplace. His book, *Impact and Influence*, has provided a foundation for the development of the associated development programme and resources. He can be contacted at rhale@vipprojects.com.