

## Influence without authority

A leader's ability to influence others without authority – in the traditional sense – is rapidly becoming a hallmark of the new era in the world or work. A client recently captured the challenge of having to influence others without authority when she said: *“Can you teach me how to hold someone accountable who doesn't report to me? If I can't demand compliance, how do I get enthusiastic cooperation?”*

In *The Firm of the Future*, a recent book by Bain & Co partner Andrew Schwedel, outlines five tectonic shifts that characterise the evolution of organisations. These combine to make the new paradigm of leadership a compelling reason for you to learn to lead and influence without using the traditional forms of power.

In summary, the relevant shifts described in *The Firm of the Future* are:

- ✓ Scale and customer intimacy are not opposed ways of competing. Take retailing or banking, where large volumes of standardised product sold at low prices were once the staple of competition. Now the dynamic has shifted to customer intimacy at low cost, courtesy of big data and digitisation.
- ✓ A hierarchy of general and functional professional managers is being replaced by fewer positions of mission-critical roles. IKEA is an example of producing beautifully designed home wares at very low cost. This achieved by focusing on two mission-critical roles: product design and purchasing.
- ✓ It used to be that distinctive assets and core competencies were the foundations of success, first made famous by Henry Ford. Now the 'new economy' firms' success is based on giant platforms, outsourcing, and small 'everything as a service' providers. These range from MS Word, Paypal, and Amazon through virtual manufacturing to all types of 'gig economy' firms.
- ✓ Leaders of firms of the future will juggle between sustaining today's business to, often as a cash cow to fund investment in tomorrow's business. Frequently the products and technologies of tomorrow will disrupt, even destroy, their parent. For leaders, the existing business requires, discipline, incremental improvement and conventional HR, finance and marketing skills. Whereas tomorrow's leaders will be more like venture capitalists, taking large risks, and using uncertain financial metrics.

### Exerting influence in the firm of the future will be different too

First, I will summarise the traditional way of thinking about influence, i.e. power. As far back as 1959, social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven identified six **bases of power**:

1. Legitimate, from the belief that a leader/manager has the formal right to make demands, and to expect others to be compliant and obedient.
2. Reward, from one person's ability to compensate another for compliance.
3. Expert, based on a person's high levels of skill and knowledge.
4. Referent, the result of a person's perceived attractiveness, worthiness and right to others' respect.
5. Coercive, from the belief that a person can punish others for noncompliance.
6. Informational, from a person's ability to control the information others need to accomplish something.

The changing context of work and organisational form now require leaders (and managers) to exercise power and influence without authority. None of the six types of power described above are fully suited to the new paradigm. Flatter management structures, outsourcing, virtual teams and increasing complexity require new ways of leading.

Jay A. Conger, in his article *The Necessary Art of Persuasion* in *Harvard Business Review* outlines ways to more effectively persuade that include establishing credibility, creating frames for common ground,

networking, providing evidence, and connecting emotionally. These competencies read more like those professional service providers, such as psychologists and social workers, and negotiators than traditional leaders. And they are *very* different. This is why learning to influence without authority is rapidly becoming the defining competence needed in so many organisations.

### **Ways you can influence without authority**

Here are 12 ways you can influence without authority.

- 1) Use your own authenticity and character. Lead by example and follow through on your commitments. Be 100% respectful and trustworthy. Link your message to your values.
- 2) Share information that is valuable. Empower by trusting others with information to which they might normally not expect to have access. Base your arguments on this information. In other words, say '*This is what the data shows; it's what I say we should do*'.
- 3) Care and connectedness: Offer insight into interpersonal issues that interfere with work. Be a facilitator of relationships. People will pay attention if you show interest in them. Find out something the other person enjoys unrelated to work and ask about it. Demonstrate you care – and mean it.
- 4) Logic: Apply logic to appeal to others' reason and intellect. Make your case based on organisational and personal benefits and cost-benefit analysis.
- 5) Expertise: Demonstrate you know the facts and attest to their validity.
- 6) Offer help: Spend an extra hour helping others with a deadline. Demonstrate that you're a team player, not just the 'boss'. People will help you as a leader if you've helped them.
- 7) Negotiate expectations: Tell people what you need and ask what it will take for them to deliver. Be realistic. Ask how you can make it easier. But once agreed, expect them to meet your expectations.
- 8) Network. Put the right people in contact with each other. Tell them why.
- 9) Say thank you in public: When someone takes time to help, thank them. Mention good deeds and achievements at meetings. Say thank you in an email and copy relevant others. People will notice and value your recognition of themselves and others.
- 10) Be transparent: No hidden agendas. Don't withhold information (and if you do need to, then explain why). People appreciate honesty.
- 11) Put it out there. Communicate clearly what you want and expect. Think it through for yourself first. And make sure the recipients pay it back – have they heard?
- 12) Do your best, but also be willing to let go. If you've tried logical, emotional and practical appeals, and they're not working, be prepared to let go – and move on.

### **Read more in-depth about this topic**

- ✓ [Exerting Influence Without Authority](#) by Lauren Keller Johnson
- ✓ [How to Influence Without Authority](#) by Jesse Lyn Stoner
- ✓ [How To Influence When You Don't Have Authority](#) by Harold Scharlatt
- ✓ [Video by Andrew Schewedl](#), Bain & Co Author of The Firm of the Future