Fundamentals

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The World Has Changed

To Be Successful You Need to Influence Up

Influence has always mattered at work. Whether it was necessary to obtain something—like a preferred assignment or a sale to an important customer—or minor favors like time off for personal events, it has always helped to have influence. Nowadays, having influence is even more important—because in order to move up in a company or impact other powerful organizations, you have to deal with a more challenging world.

The rapidity of change and uncertain economies has given way to more complex organizations that have a greater number of stakeholders whose cooperation is necessary—despite the simultaneous need for things to happen more quickly. Many people work in matrix organizations with multiple bosses, or they have jobs that cross departmental boundaries. This requires that they influence others who might not have the same goals or agree on what—or who—is necessary to succeed.

These days, you need powerful people to cooperate in terms of getting information, formal or informal approval to act, resources, introductions, and support (or room to maneuver) for implementation just to get your job done. Therefore, you can't achieve your objectives without getting help from others whom you do not control.

But merely doing your job won't guarantee that you'll advance. In an era of cost cutting and increased competition, organizations have to think about how to grow the top line and create new customers, products, markets, or processes that enable investment in growth. The employees who get ahead go beyond their job; they take initiative, create these opportunities, and solve problems that block progress.

This book is for you if you are trying to make significant contributions, yet are finding it increasingly difficult to do so because you need to influence people you can't control. It's usually not enough to point out impending problems/opportunities or even to propose solutions. You may have to garner support for your proposed solution or conduct small pilot tests. All of this involves the need to influence powerful people. Fortunately, you are likely in a position to have ideas that are of value to these powerful people. In fact, you are probably closer to the customer, and certainly to the operational problems, than more senior managers. You might have some special expertise or relevant past experiences.

As consultants, we frequently ask managers what they could do to make their organization a more creative, productive place, and the ideas tumble out. However, these are often quickly followed with a drop in enthusiasm as the manager sighs, "But there is nothing that I can do."

But there is plenty you can do, and we show you with scores of real examples throughout the book how others have found a way to overcome what at first appears to be a discouraging situation. We tell the story of Doug, a national sales manager of a multinational organization, who feels that he isn't able to use all his skills and knowledge because he has a micromanaging boss. There's Lucia Emerson at

"Grandetech," who is expected in her role as task force leader to figure out a new system that requires agreement from three very different divisions, each of which has its own objectives. There's also Peter Dames in the IT department at Toyota USA, who has to get on the radar of senior management so he can get them to accept new ways to use e-commerce. You might be like Indira Rai, who is doing well in a company she loves but is blocked from moving into a dream job by her possessive boss. Or you might be able to relate to a team of managers that has put together what they feel confident is an exciting new business idea and they need to gain senior management backing to go forward—even though their cobbled-together first product lost $6 million!

This book is not just for the employee who is expected to take initiative to produce change and bring in new ideas within a company. It's also for those who must influence customers, or for consultants who have to sell an ambitious game-changing project to a client who focuses only on cost—as Mike May from Accenture often did. Or perhaps your challenge is closer to that of Kristen Callahan, who is simply fighting to get an elusive, famous surgeon—the only one with a possible curative approach—to see her sick friend for a consultation. That's an influence success you will learn about in Chapter 12.

Most of the examples in the book describe actual situations, though we've altered specifics in some instances for privacy reasons. Only when we note that we are offering potential dialogue is anything *not* a report from our research and organizational observations.

The issues we discuss are increasingly being faced by managers at all levels, and they can present risks. Going directly to the chief executive officer (CEO), as Peter Dames did at Toyota, to demand that he come and see his department's demonstration is cheeky and could have the potential to be a career-limiting move. We don't deny that. However, "just doing your job," burying your head in the sand, avoiding anything that could possibly get you in trouble, and cursing your fate for having to deal with all those impossible people—these could be the riskiest behaviors of all! Although it is difficult, you need to find ways to successfully fulfill your current role while functioning like an

entrepreneurial leader by constantly finding new and better ways to do things—and gaining the support you need to implement them.

This book is about how to both do your present job more successfully *and* take the initiative that will make you a more valued organization member. We can't totally eradicate risk, nor can we guarantee success; we can only put the odds in your favor by compelling you to see your relationships with powerful people in a different way. We provide knowledge about power differentials and how to overcome the obstacles, and encouragement to change some aspects of the way you have been operating.

Although there's no doubt that external realities such as very difficult bosses or remote senior managers can present significant challenges (problems we address in later chapters), we've found that you, the person seeking influence, often erect your own barriers to achieving that influence. The reasons for this are various and include the following:

- The assumptions you hold about how hard to push
- An unwillingness to raise a tough issue or have a difficult conversation with your boss
- A combative tone that provokes the exact reactions you dislike
- Fear of being turned down
- Inability to let go of your own concerns long enough to remember to give something valuable to get cooperation
- Any problems you might have dealing with authority

These self-limiting attitudes and behaviors are why you will have to take a tough look at yourself at various points in the book, while also carefully analyzing the person or group you need to influence. You have more ability to make a difference than you may think. It will help you to accomplish your goal if you keep in mind the following two conceptual themes that we present in this book:

1. Understanding the dynamics of power and overcoming the negative consequences of large power gaps.

2. Becoming a partner with high-powered people, whether as near as your boss, or as distant as a senior executive far up in your organization or in another organization.

Influence is exerted by reciprocity and exchange; in other words, people can be influenced when they receive something that they value in return for their response. Therefore, anyone can influence anyone else if they have something valuable to trade and can be trusted to deliver it. It's not always easy to figure out what people value, how to approach them, how to maintain trust, and how to make it clear that you aren't just looking out for your own interests. We built a generic model for working through all aspects of how to influence through exchange in our previous book, *Influence without Authority*. This book significantly expands on that model by providing examples of how to effectively apply influence when dealing upward.

The Impact of Large Power Differentials

In today's complex organizational world, you will increasingly be dealing with people who may be neither peers nor friends. These individuals have much more formal power than you have—and that's especially true when there are many organizational levels between you and those you need to influence. Middle managers have to deal with senior executives more often than ever, and they may need to influence across organizational boundaries as well. Regardless of whether it's within your organization or between your organization and another, the greater the power differential, the more difficult influence becomes.

Unfortunately, this kind of large power gap tends to produce dysfunctional behavior for people on both sides of the equation. Relatively high-power people tend to overvalue their own contributions and undervalue others', whereas those with less authority tend to overestimate higher-level individuals' power and underestimate their own. This makes it hard for both to get what they need. Higher-ups don't get the information and support they need to complete complex work,

whereas those with less power fail to gain the credibility they need to use all of their capacities. We will discuss how this peculiar dynamic works in Chapters 2 and 3 and give suggestions throughout the book on how to overcome it.

Despite these challenges, most people have potentially much greater power than they think they do—and can therefore contribute more than they think they can without diminishing those in high-power positions. We will show how to effectively reduce these kinds of power differences so you can deal with high-power people—especially senior executives—and not fall into the traps that large power gaps often set. As long as you don't inadvertently give away your power, are willing to do your homework, and act with reasonable courage, you can increase your influence with a variety of high-power people.

Underlying our analysis is the little-realized phenomenon that power is usually *not a fixed amount*; it doesn't work in a way that means the more I take, the less there is for you. Thus, increasing your ability to influence usually does not require that you take away others' power. Instead, power is a *variable*, with a total amount that can be low or high. As we will demonstrate, you can decrease the power gap without decreasing the higher party's power. And since significantly increasing your influence can actually add to the other person's power, the outcome is usually win-win.

Becoming a Partner

Once you've come to understand what's at work in the dynamics of power differences, your second job is to adopt the mind-set that you must "become a partner" with authority figures. Although this may sound paradoxical in light of the usual characteristics of a power gap, it is a style of interacting that can have major positive consequences.

Relationships *do* matter for success in organizations. No one can accomplish much working alone, and the nature of how people connect with one another has major repercussions both for the organization's performance and for each individual's access to information and

resources. This access determines effectiveness, reputation, and potential for advancement.

As everyone who has ever worked knows, work relationships have the potential to be unsatisfying and ineffective. Either or both parties can feel angry, stifled, mystified, vulnerable, misguided, untrusted, or deeply frustrated. Negative relationships frequently become frozen, with neither person knowing how to improve the relationship. This often leads to both people engaging in negative behavior, thereby aggravating each other and creating an atmosphere in which conditions only worsen and each person constantly blames—and tries to change—the other. Consistently battling these kinds of conflicts ultimately leads to separation—by firing, quitting, transferring, or just ignoring each other.

These negative relationships, however, are not the only kind; work relationships also have the potential to be satisfying and productive. We will describe and advocate a different approach to developing relationships between parties of unequal power. Although this emphasizes the connection you have with your boss, it also includes most other powerful people. This requires that both senior and junior employees move toward a *partnership* in which both are concerned for the other, voice their interests and differences, and think win-win where possible. You can "join with" the boss instead of just "reporting to" the boss—and at least sometimes, you can partner with those who usually expect only transactions, if anything at all.

This was the situation that Mary Quinn faced. She didn't think she could continue working for the "nasty witch" (Fran McNaughton, the vice president [VP] of development in a large software company), who had been her supervisor for the past year. She wrote "May 15" on the white board in her office, which was the day she would receive her bonus check. After that she could resign.

Mary, a business applications specialist, was based in New York, while Fran worked in the Boston office. Most of the time the two women spoke by phone, via abrupt and unpleasant conversations that Mary found dreadful. Fran's clipped, critical style and snapped-off orders had led Mary to feel that she was dealing with a corporate bully. According to Mary's description:

Fran had obviously never heard the maxim, "praise in public and criticize in private." I would suggest something and receive no response. Two minutes later another direct report would say the same thing and receive high praise. Fran ignored me at national conferences, and instead would hang out with the three tech guys on staff—people from whom I would hear that "Fran can't stand you." Though she heard good things about me, she clearly disliked me.

Although Mary's impulses were to demonize Fran and accept the status quo, or quit, she finally decided to take one shot at confronting her in person. She went to New York for a heart-to-heart talk:

Fran explained what aggravated her: "You go off and call meetings without me being aware; you do other things without asking, like take features out of an upcoming release to make the date without asking me." I acknowledged that what she said was true, but not meant to be disrespectful. I had just been trying to do the job as I had done it before . . .

She smiled for the first time during that conversation, and turned from an ogre into a nice human being. Suddenly we were both people meeting face-to-face, not just managers in a Corporation. Her demeanor changed, and she explained: "It's just that I hear after the fact . . ." I agreed, empathized, and told her how much I respected her knowledge—and her smile grew. I realized that we had both been running away from conflict up until that point.

I began to see her as someone who was trying to please her demanding management; she did have people screaming at her to "get it done yesterday." I therefore became much more sympathetic and invited her to my next meeting . . . I respected her expertise; however, it was hard to forget two years of bullying. So while we were not exactly friendly, we were no longer hostile.

(You can read about Mary and Fran in more detail at our website, influencewithoutauthority.com). What is so hard about directly talking to your boss about how he or she treats you? It seems like an

obvious approach, yet way too many people are unwilling or unable to do it. Speaking directly to your boss about the relationship is not always easy to do, but it is a potent way of approaching a relatively powerful person with whom you need to have a productive relationship. Does it always work? Of course not. Your boss may be—at least in your view—far more miserable than Fran turned out to be—nastier, less willing to give credit, more of a micromanager, fearful of conflict. The best you can do in some situations is cut your losses, look for a way out as soon as possible, and resolve to learn from seeing the terrible effects that a really bad boss can have. The problem is that you might be as convinced of the futility of addressing the problem as Mary was. This attitude might be a result of your professional history, strong feelings, vulnerability and fear of being fired or losing the relationship—or just your lack of skill at working on a relationship.

So although it might have been true that Fran really "didn't like Mary" very much, and found Mary threatening and hard to control, she wasn't necessarily a bad person who enjoyed attacking at every opportunity. She was simply trying to meet the demands of her own superiors.

When you are in a relationship that has deteriorated like this, it is hard not to attribute all the blame to the boss's defects, or to assume that things will go badly if you try to address the problems in the relationship. Once you have decided upon your own explanation for your boss's (or any other person's) drawbacks, everything that happens tends to confirm your beliefs. Furthermore, since the boss *does* have the potential to affect your future, it can seem overwhelmingly threatening to open discussion on the subject. What if the boss retaliates?

It's hard not to begin to employ strategies like selective communication or even sheer avoidance as ways of manipulating the boss into not being too harmful. However, this book maintains that you want to influence your boss in a way that more closely resembles a partnership—admittedly with you in the junior partner role—in which each of you delivers in a more satisfying way. We will show you how to go about doing that—even in very difficult circumstances.

These two themes—understanding power differentials and partnering to enhance influence—are interrelated. People often consider power and relationships to be antithetical; they wonder, "Do I use all my power and ability to coercively push for what I want and risk alienating others, or do I go along for the sake of maintaining the relationship?"

However, these two themes are not only compatible; they in fact build on each other. The influence approach we use recommends that people actually build relationships; there is reciprocity and mutuality despite inequality of power, and taking a "partner" orientation increases your influence. Making powerful people partners helps determine their response to the approach. Because this partnering approach is founded on concern for mutual and organizational success, the assumption of potential partnership is most likely to gain cooperation.

Furthermore, understanding the power dynamics between these two groups can help you determine what matters most to those with higher power—which helps you figure out which approach to use to make influence success more likely. If you can accurately diagnose what powerful people value, you can determine how to persuade them and figure out what they might desire in exchange for what you want. It can also help you diminish the power differentials that prevent collaboration.

Example of Successful Upward Influence for Major Accomplishments

The following is the story of three colleagues who had to influence senior managers around a new, ambiguous, and uncertain opportunity after making an early blunder. Although managers involved in the project have insisted that the mistake remain confidential, it can be said that the scenario occurred at a well-known Fortune 100 industrial company that prided itself on incremental

innovation. The three individuals manage different functions within a business unit at the company. However, the organization faced problems when one of their big customers complained that they weren't able to solve a recurring problem. The managers wanted to make everything right and believed that this customer provided an incredible market opportunity—if they could develop a product that used knowledge and resources from areas throughout the organization. They worked together with their boss's support, but kept his role behind the scenes because they were negotiating with the customer. They set about to cobble together a new piece of equipment that, if successful, could open up a whole new area of business.

It wouldn't have been possible in certain companies to get three separate functions with differing components to work together. Although it wasn't easy in this instance, this organization's boundaries were less impermeable, and the three individuals knew each other well. They collaborated to bring large components to one site, even renting a plane to fly in a piece from Europe. They successfully proved that all the parts could be assembled to work together, satisfying the large customer and completing a very large sale. The customer was billed, paid, and the deal was officially in the books.

However, accounting/finance was doing a year-end audit some months later and discovered that there was a $6 million cash loss on the sale. The managers had drawn bits and pieces and manpower from all parts of the organization that they hadn't formally tracked. This wasn't exactly the instant moneymaker they had thought it would be, and they hesitated, knowing that an unanticipated loss of that magnitude could be a career-stopper.

Nevertheless, the three men believed deeply that the product could be very successful if the company were willing to invest in it. They also knew that their competitors were probably working

(*continued*)

on other solutions, so they tried to garner some support. They couldn't get the expense capitalized after the fact, and it was clear that they didn't have a promising business prospect if they couldn't find a way to dramatically reduce the costs involved in manufacturing the complete product. But they still believed in the opportunity. How could they not only gain forgiveness for creating a huge loss but also get to continue work on the product?

They had originally made a strong business case to their boss, and realized now that this might be the only way to recover the cash they had spent. He therefore supported their approach to a sector executive VP several levels higher. They knew this man only from Business Unit quarterly presentations, but thought he might be interested in nurturing a new venture as part of his charge, which included finding significant new sources of revenue. They argued their case that this was a way to help the company build a completely new breakthrough business. Their projections depended on what competitors would do, and they feared that competitors would solve the problem first unless they continued to refine the product. They had to figure out how to more than halve the cost of the product, and wanted a chance to work on it.

In turn, they offered an exchange: they would unofficially report and where necessary defer to him on every question, internal or external, about the first product, customers, technology, capacity, and so on. In return, they would inform him weekly or as often as he wanted about every aspect of what they were doing. That way, there would be no surprises, and he could pull the plug if they weren't making good progress. In effect, they were willing to provide ongoing reports to this executive VP while doing their own jobs, a kind of informal dotted line reporting relationship: a partnership. After intensive questioning, he agreed to provide "cloud cover" for them. It took a

year, but they went on to build a very profitable business, currently reaping sales of more than $700 million a year.

Of course, not all attempts are so successful, especially if they so dramatically overspend in the first go-around. And even if they receive support from above, few would be able to gain the time to prove themselves; many more cannot even get past the reluctant, skeptical, or uncertain top management in the first place—either because a layered hierarchical organization inhibits their access, or because they don't present their proposal well. We will have a lot to say about how to be more influential; for now, take heart. If they could pull this off, you too can acquire major influence.

The Book's Organization

This book is divided into three parts:

- Part I, "Fundamentals," examines the dynamics of power (Chapters 2 and 3), then looks at our influence model (the Cohen-Bradford Influence Model; Chapter 4) and its application to an unhappy relationship between a national sales manager and the boss thought to be too controlling (Chapter 5).
- Part II, "Building a Powerful Partnership with Your Boss," examines in detail the challenges of building a partnership relationship with your boss. Chapter 6 expands the meaning of "true partner." Chapter 7 lays out the steps involved; however, this doesn't always go easily. Chapter 8 explores some of the common difficulties and how to overcome them. Chapter 9 extends the concept of partnership to describe various ways you can help your boss succeed (since that is what junior partners should do).

- Part III, "Influencing Powerful People" (Chapters 10 to 15), looks at how to effectively deal with more distant senior executives. Power discrepancies come more strongly into play when interacting with these individuals. We will also look at the special dynamics involved when dealing with them from outside the organization. Although a "partner orientation" can still be helpful in dealing up many levels, it is less likely that you can generate the kind of tight relationship that is more possible with your direct boss.

When producing major change, you are probably going to have to influence multiple actors. To help you with this, Chapter 10 examines the process of identifying the relevant stakeholders and assessing their role in the change process. Because influence depends on knowing what is important to the other, Chapter 11 goes deep into how to assess powerful stakeholders' goals, needs, and concerns. It can be difficult to even gain access to powerful people far up the hierarchy, so Chapter 12 will lay out a variety of approaches. Chapter 13 looks at the actual give-and-take influence process that happens once face-to-face contact has been established.

Finally, we conclude with two chapters that provide major examples of how determined, persistent, and effective influencers have each used variations of what we've explained. Sometimes they've done so through careful diagnosis and plans; at others, by intuitively tuning in to the needs and concern of those whose cooperation they needed.

As suggested, we'll also introduce you to a number of other people who discovered that the challenging and (they assumed) "impossible" people they needed to influence were not necessarily lost causes. Their stories teach useful lessons and show how to apply the ideas we underline. We'll also provide some examples of influence failures, at least one of which led to expensive delays that cost one biopharma company millions because key stakeholders in a critical process were overlooked.

Think hard about whether all this is for you. If the risk is too high for you to bear—or if taking action could too easily lead to a career-limiting move—then you likely have to find a way to tolerate your status quo, or get out. However, we urge you to, at the very least, carefully analyze the possibilities before you give up. We deeply believe that you can be even more highly influential and effective.

Good luck!