

Managing power: the use of influencing styles

Introduction

Both in organizations where hierarchy is important and in organizations where emphasis is on collaborative relationships, personal influencing capability matters. It's not only your formal position, the stripes on your sleeve that make the difference. Particularly an executive's own influencing capability and power determine his or her personal effectiveness.

In this hand-out we discuss various of influencing so as to elucidate:

- ▼ what influencing styles look like
- ▼ and what the effect of their application is

But first we will briefly explain the difference between the exertion of influence and power. The reason for this is we have noticed that the negative ring of 'power' has an inhibiting effect on the way we think about our own influencing capability as well as on means to increase it.

Power and influencing capability

The exertion of power quite frequently gives rise to unpleasant feelings, such as dependence, manipulation, misuse and having to do things one doesn't want to. In many cases, these feelings stem from one's own experience with other people's behavior. All of us have, at some time or other, experienced a situation in which we felt under pressure or belittled by the power exerted by someone else. What we experience then is a feeling of powerlessness, a feeling of being subjected to another person's power, of being belittled.

Examples:

- ▼ a policeman who can fine you 'as he pleases'
- ▼ an executive who can thwart a promotion; situations in which someone else has means of power which you do not possess yourself.
- ▼ Someone else ridiculing one of your ideas, which makes you feel that your contribution is not appreciated.

However, power can also be used positively, as in the following cases:

- ▼ an executive who tells an employee what he expects in terms of results, and who asks what kind of support the employee needs to achieve that result.
- ▼ a person who listens to another person, and who shows that he is doing so by asking questions, by summarizing and by reflecting the other person's feelings.

In these examples the other person is accepted as he is, taken seriously. The person who uses his influence in these examples is perceived as transparent, reliable and as a pleasant discussion partner.

In the master class we concentrate on how to exert our personal influencing capability. This personal capability has little to do with one's hierarchical position in the organization, but much more with one's personal skills in the field of exerting influence.

Searching for and rediscovering influencing options

The influencing styles that are central in this master class will, no doubt, be recognized by most, because we have used them when we were children, or because we have seen other people use them. As a result of the experience we gained in the course of our lives, some of these styles have fallen into disuse while yet other have developed as preferred styles.

Experiences such as:

- ▼ parents who teach their children to ask for things in a polite manner, instead of saying “I want this or that”.
- ▼ a person who frequently uses the same style in a commanding manner, so that the other person will start to dislike it.
- ▼ being submerged, for a prolonged period of time, in a certain culture in which a certain style is invariably appreciated (such as scoring points by arguing) whereas another is not (such as daring to be vulnerable).

The object of this master class is to acquire greater skill in using influence and, thus, in switching between styles depending on what is desirable in a certain situation.

Energy: pushing and pulling

When using influence, energy can be applied in two directions, namely for pushing and pulling. We mean the following by this:

- ▼ moving contrary to another person, or pushing (for instance: “I want you to hand this report at 4.00 p.m. tomorrow”)
- ▼ moving along with another person, or pulling (for instance: “What is your opinion about this proposition?”)

When a person is using ‘push’energy, he occupies a lot of space; when he uses ‘pull’energy, things are exactly the other way round. In the latter case he rather allows space to the other person.

The trick is to use both types of energy, since a leader is only effective when he displays both ‘pushing’and ‘pulling’ energies. A person who only pushes is perceived as commanding, as focussing on himself instead of the other person. A person who only pulls is perceived as interested, but unclear as to what he wants himself. In addition, it is important to ensure a balance between pushing and pulling; every situation calls for a different balance between ‘push’and ‘pull’energies.

Five influencing styles

We distinguish five influencing styles:

1. persuading
2. stating
3. bridging
4. inspiring
5. moving away

Persuading and stating use ‘push’energy, bridging and inspiring use ‘pull’energy and moving away doesn’t use either of these. We will discuss each style separately.

Re 1 Persuading

This style is characterised by making proposals and substantiating these. People who are good at this style will, for instance, table ideas in a meeting; they will support these ideas with facts and arguments, and they do so in a quiet and business-like manner.

Elements of this style:

- ▼ Making proposals

This includes the tabling of ideas and proposals.

“I suggest that we select three out of the ten recommendations mentioned in the report, as I feel that these deserve the highest priority”.

“I suggest that we finish the meeting at 4.00 p.m.”

▼ Arguing

By this we mean arguing to underpin one's own proposal or idea, such as:

"My proposal is that we'd better give full attention to three issues than dealing with only parts of all issues. *The reason I say so is that it's my experience that this limitation results in the ideas actually being implemented*".

"I suggest we agree on a time to end this meeting, *for I know from experience that acting in this way makes it much easier to stick to agreements made*".

The style of arguing can also be used to provide arguments opposing someone else's proposal, or to express doubt. For example:

"I do not agree to your proposal to raise our profit by putting a new product on the market, *because further development of our current product will save us time, also resulting in profit.*"

Using this style, it is important to briefly and powerfully mention the most important arguments, instead of burying the other person under a load of arguments.

Re 2 Stating

A person who is skilled in this style does the following:

- ▼ formulating accurately what he expects from the other person.
- ▼ judging, either positively or negatively, about the other person's contribution.
- ▼ offering reward or threatening punishment, with the objective of changing the other person's behaviour.

People who effectively (in the right situation and in a clear manner) use this style are transparent, consistent and predictable.

Elements of this style:

▼ Setting standards

By this we mean the formulation of needs, requirements, standards, expectations and feedback (in feedback you use a combination of judgements and setting standards).

Example:

"I don't need your help for this" (= need)

"I'd like to have this report at 4.00 p.m." (= requirement)

"The last three times you were late for our appointment; this makes me feel that you think our appointments are unimportant to you" (= judging). I would appreciate it if you could be on time in the future (= setting standards).

▼ Judging

By this we mean expressing a judgement (either positive or negative) about the other person's behaviour or contribution, on the basis of one's own values or intuition. For example: "I think that you have very transparently underpinned the proposal".

▼ Bargaining

By bargaining about performances or actions you make it attractive for the other person to do something, or to refrain from doing something.

"If you assist me today in finishing this report, I will help you with the preparations for this new assignment".

"If you get on with this job now, we can stop earlier this afternoon".

Re 3 Bridging

A person who uses this style focuses on the other person, is interested in how the other person perceives the situation. This person tries to put himself in the other person's position and radiates interest in the other person. This is done by listening, encouraging the other person and by expressing what he is saying.

Elements of this style:

▼ Involving

By this we mean: asking for information and opinions, supporting and encouraging the other person, reacting to what the other person thinks or feels.

For example:

“What do you think of the idea Peter has suggested? (= asking for an opinion)

“To me, your feedback is helpful; would you do again next time?” (=encouraging the other person)

“I notice that you feel not responded to in this group; how about trying to find out what causes this?” (= reacting to what the other person thinks or feels).

▼ Listening

This consists of summarising what the other person has said and expressing the other person's feelings.

Example:

“If I understand you correctly, you prefer to postpone our appointment?” (= summarising)

“You are very satisfied with the results so far”. (=expressing the other person's feelings)

Re 4 Inspiring

The person who uses the inspiring style uses energy to induce another person to join or follow him. It is a style which gives meaning and substance to activities and which brings people together on their way to a common objective.

A person who is skilled in this style acts as follows:

▼ he searches for and stresses common values, interests and ideals in order to achieve adequate co-operation.

▼ using expressive language, he describes a beautiful future on the basis of shared values and ideals.

Elements of inspiring

▼ Linking

By this we mean the linkage of shared targets, values and interests.

For example:

“I notice that we both think that the quality of our service is important”.

▼ Inspired prediction

This concerns ways to paint a picture of attractive opportunities and solutions, but also the sharing of hopes and expectations.

For example:

“Imagine what we could achieve together if we joined forces and operated under one name” .(=attractive opportunities)

“I hope that we will manage at some time in the future to make an invention that will once and for all rid us from this problem”. (=sharing of hope)

Re 5 Moving away

A person who uses the moving-away style is saving energy, rather than using it. This style may come in handy when minor conflicts are imminent, which the person in question regards as unimportant and which he does not wish to spend his energy on. Moving away is also helpful when a person is under unbearable tension, for instance, because of the unbearable pressure that another person is exerting.

Moving away comes in two forms:

▼ Letting go

▼ This is a constructive form of moving away, where the person himself makes a choice, namely to let go of the subject for the time being, and to come back to it later.

For example:

“Your request really takes me by surprise. I’d like some time to think it over and then I’ll call you back half an hour from now”.

“I feel very tired, and that isn’t to the benefit of our conversation. I would like to postpone our talk until tomorrow, so we can both give this important subject the attention it deserves”.

▼ Evading

This is *not* a constructive form of moving away, as it means that you give in to the feeling to avoid a certain situation, such as a conflict. The person acting in this manner displays behaviour to ‘keep the situation pleasant’. This person influences neither the situation nor the other person, and consequently does not change anything. This style may arouse negative feelings in the other person (“You never really say what you think”).

Typical evasive lines are:

“I think we more or less agree”. (although this is not at all the case!)

“We’d better skip this item”.

Why don’t we ask someone else, maybe the boss, to take this decision?

‘Pushing’ and ‘pulling’ styles summarised

Both for persuading and stating, ‘push’ energy is used, where ‘pushing’ refers to a powerful style or approach to change something in another person. The effective use of persuading and stating styles ensures that a message clearly comes across.

For ridging and inspiring, ‘pull’ energy is used; the other person is pulled, as it were, towards the person using these techniques. Both styles are very powerful in their effects: the other person will feel involved and inspired. Finally, this hand-out discussed the style of moving away, a style which, in its constructive form (temporarily letting go of a subject), will save energy.

The following is applicable to these styles:

- ▼ each style is effective, provided it is used skillfully and in the right situation.
- ▼ consequently, each style can have a negative effect if not used skillfully or if used in the wrong situation.
- ▼ each style can be practised.