

WHITE PAPER

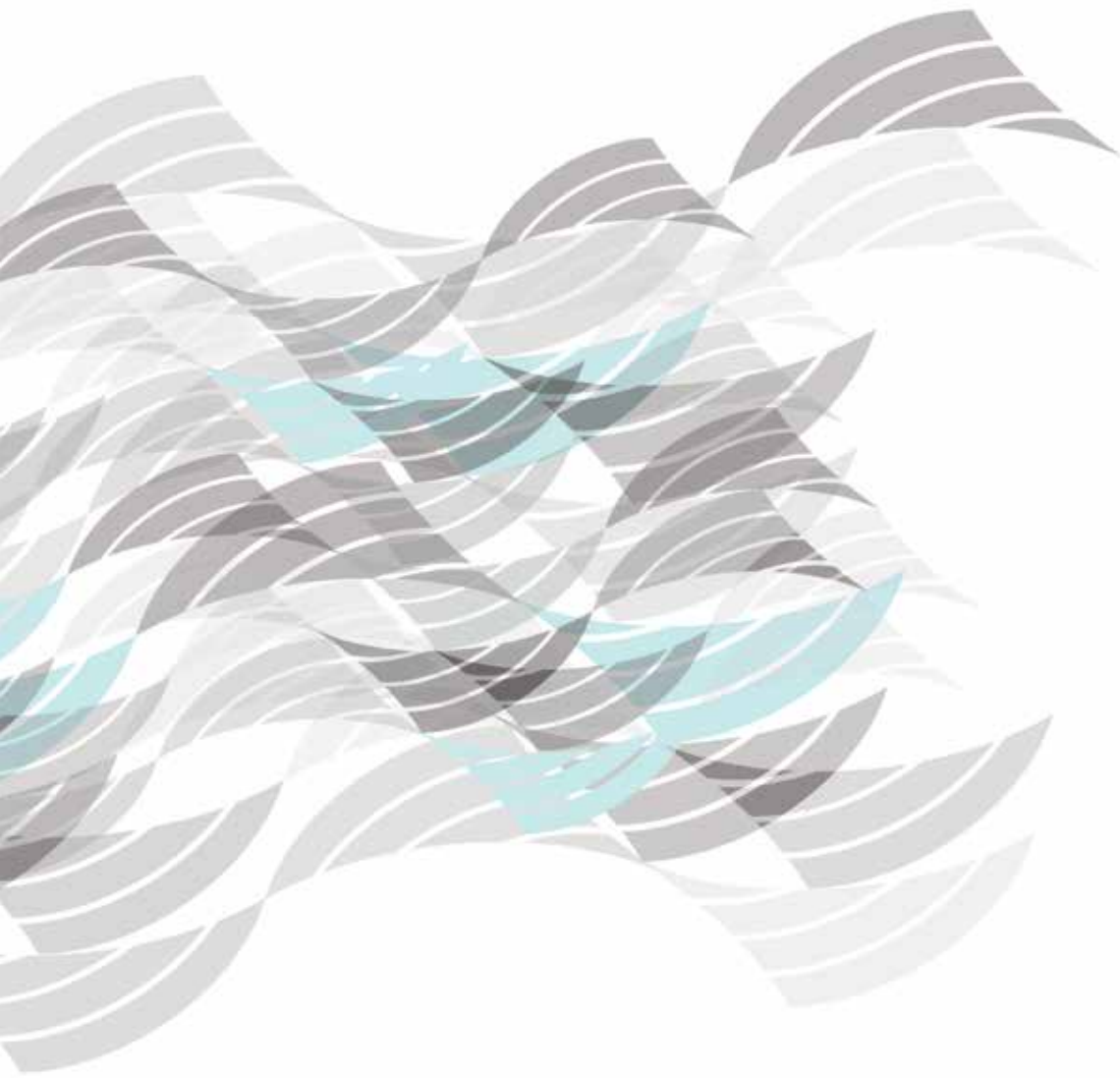
Influencing: The Skill of Persuasion

Building Commitment and Getting Results



By Marc Dellaert and Sergey Davydov





Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary | 1 |
| Three Outcomes of Influencing | 2 |
| Three Influencing Tactics: The Head, The Heart, The Hands | 3 |
| Six Essential Influencing Skills | 7 |
| Influencing, Manipulation, and Power | 8 |
| Strategic Influencing | 10 |
| Conclusion | 12 |
| References and Reading List | 12 |
| About the Authors | 13 |

“Influencing may be the highest level of human skills.”

—Unknown Author

Executive Summary

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) defines leadership as a collective social process leading to direction, alignment, and commitment toward the organization's or group's goals. In reality, groups or teams consist of individual people with different values, needs, visions, and agendas. As we convince and persuade others around us—bosses, peers, direct reports, superiors, partners, clients, vendors, other divisions—influence is occurring continuously at the workplace. Without influencing others, a leader cannot make his or her vision take place.

Influence comes from the Latin *influere*, meaning to flow into. Influence is the ability of a person or leader to affect, to shape or to transform the opinions (convincing) and the behaviors or actions (persuading) of other people without necessarily having a formal authority over these person(s). Influencing is soft or personal power, independent of one's positional power. It allows a leader to get things done and to achieve desired outcomes without coercion.

Influence is something we learn in childhood. It takes place in families, among friends, in communities, at the workplace, and in society in general. An average person influences a hundred or more people a day. CCL research shows that influencing is one of the four critical leadership competencies for every leader at every level in the organization.

In this white paper we help leaders to understand the three outcomes of influencing, the three types of tactics that can be used to influence others, and the six essential skills for effective influencing.

Three Outcomes of Influencing

Influence is an essential part of leadership. The position of a leader in an organization and the power it gives are not enough to motivate or inspire people. A leader promotes or sells his or her ideas or the ideas of those that he or she represents. This is particularly important in today's organizations, which have become less hierarchical and less dependent on individual heroes.

The outcomes of influencing are **commitment**, **compliance**, or **resistance**.

- Leaders with developed influencing skills achieve their goals more effectively. Influencing then results in **commitment**, which means voluntary support. This goes with a lower need for monitoring, a higher sustained effort over time, a better focus on a shared goal, and improved interpersonal relations.
- If the influencing by the leader is less effective, people become **compliant**. Their attitude and mindset do not change. Consent can lead to higher productivity for well-defined tasks but does not unleash the full potential of engagement and creativity of the talent.
- If the influencing is not effective, the result is **resistance** either by obstructing or sabotaging, by asking a higher authority to overrule the leader, by attempting to persuade the leader to renounce his or her idea, by looking for excuses, or by pretending to comply (false compliance).

“Influencing is selling ideas internally. The leader inspires, motivates and engages individuals, teams, and the whole organization. Recognizing talent and creating a climate of security for the group are essential.”

—Chief Financial Officer (retired) of a Global Airline

Three Influencing Tactics: The Head, The Heart, The Hands

Leaders use influence to implement decisions and to gain support for ideas and their vision. There are different ways that a leader can influence the behaviors and opinions of others: through facts and logic, through appeals to values and beliefs, or through support of them.

CCL has found that leaders can influence by applying three types of tactics: logical, emotional, and cooperative. These tactics do not harm relationships when they are used.

- 1. Logical influencing tactics (the Head)** address people in a rational or intellectual way. Arguments and information such as facts and figures are brought forward in the best interest of the organization, the team, or the person.
- 2. Emotional influencing tactics (the Heart)** connect the communication or decision to a person's feelings of well-being or sense of belonging. The leader appeals to attitudes, values, a common purpose, ideals, and beliefs through inspiration or enthusiasm.
- 3. Cooperative influencing tactics (the Hands)** involve seeking advice and offering assistance. The leader reinforces the connection that he or she has with the others. Collaborating to accomplish a mutually important goal extends a hand to others.



Each person has a preference for how he or she would like to be influenced. Selecting the best influence tactic is important to achieve the desired outcome with a person or group. Effective leaders understand the way others want to be influenced and apply the right tactics to build alignment and commitment. Leaders who combine the three tactics are likely to be evaluated as better performers.



1. The Head: Influencing Through Logical Appeals

Logical thinking or left-brain thinking is a process of clearly moving from one related thought to another.

The leader who influences others through a logical appeal can use dialogical thinking, critical thinking, scientific thinking, or dialectic thinking.

Dialogical thinking takes place in a trustful relationship between peers or a leader and a colleague, individually or in a group. With the help of good questioning, people can share their honest opinions, reach a deeper level of understanding or self-awareness, and think out of the box. Dialogical thinking is important from an individual and organizational perspective. It helps the leader to collect more data and to ensure proper buy-in. It also takes away mistrust and suspicion.

Critical thinking helps leaders and their teams to collect all of the information required to analyze a situation and to generate the best solution to a problem. It allows including feedback from all the people involved in the process. Individual opinions and preferences do not count. Critical thinking is indispensable in good judgment, problem solving, and decision making.

Influencing through **scientific thinking** applies a systematic and logical approach to building knowledge based on theories, hypotheses, and reproducible empirical evidence. The scientific approach is based on theory and data. In a business environment scientific thinking is relevant where reliance on data or intuition alone can be difficult. Theory (framing the right questions), intuition, and creativity allow the generation of hypotheses that are validated. Leaders can then make decisions by testing hypotheses with data.

Dialectic thinking refers to the ability to view issues from multiple perspectives and to arrive at the best possible reconciliation of opposing positions. This can be used while facilitating a discussion or solving a problem to come to a shared conclusion. In a business environment the leader can use the approach of the “Devil’s Advocate”—similar to the court prosecutor. Another technique is the “Wright Stuff,” going back to the technique of aviation pioneers the Wright Brothers; they switched sides and viewpoints to challenge each other. Through the dialectical process the leader encourages the team to identify new ideas and come to a consensus on the best solution.



2. The Heart: Influencing Through Emotional Appeal

The leader who is emotionally intelligent is self-aware, manages his or her emotions and impulses, understands the emotions of others, and is able to inspire and influence while avoiding or resolving conflict.

By addressing people on the emotional level, leaders have the ability to unleash strong levels of passion and **commitment**.

“Leaders who identify themselves with the mission and values of the organization, build high leadership trustworthiness. Trust and credibility are amongst the most powerful levers to influence others.”

—Senior Executive of a Global Top-5 Healthcare Company

Building and maintaining **trust** is essential for leaders to influence others. Leaders who communicate openly, who are liked, and who show similar behaviors can more easily build trust and are more credible. Openness, the ability to admit mistakes, truthfulness, genuine praise and positive feedback, keeping confidentiality, and consistency are important leadership behaviors to build trust.

Influential leaders create **shared purpose** by aligning values and value. In doing so, leaders can appeal to **common sense**, **legitimacy**, or **social proof** to influence others, building on views, beliefs, attitudes, rules, or behaviors that are accepted by or common to most people and that do not require a debate. If a group is doing something or has a certain shared opinion, there is a high chance that others will follow. When these mindsets, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes are common to the whole organization, this is referred to as the organizational culture.



3. The Hands: Influencing Through Cooperative Appeal

Cooperation is the action or process of working together for a common or mutual benefit. It is opposed to working in competition for the benefit of oneself. Cooperation can happen through teamwork, participation, contribution, partnership, association, and assistance.

Humans appreciate courtesy and tend to reward those who have given something. By offering someone help there is a high probability that this person will show gratitude.

A primary technique for influencing through cooperative appeal is fostering cooperation. Cooperation cannot be built through good intentions only. Creating a positive attitude based on interpersonal trust is essential to make cooperation happen.

Effective leaders

- create reasonable expectations on the level of interaction to balance self and group interests;
- demonstrate and promote cooperative behaviors that they want to be imitated;
- build interdependence by shaping a group identity or culture.

By fostering a culture of cooperation leaders strengthen their ability to influence and to create direction, alignment, and commitment.

Six Essential Influencing Skills

Effectively engaging the Head, the Heart, and the Hands across the many people and situations that a leader encounters requires using a diverse set of skills. To shape direction, alignment, and commitment through interactions with others, leaders must be skilled in six areas:

1. Understanding and navigating organizational politics

Organizations have formal and informal structures. Understanding and effectively navigating through complex political situations require political insight. Leaders adjust to the reality of corporate politics and are sensitive to how the organization functions.

2. Creating visibility

To create new opportunities, effective leaders stand out and get noticed by others while staying authentic. They are careful to allow their team members to shine while not over-promoting themselves.

3. Building and maintaining personal trustworthiness

Leaders ask others to take risks along with them. Therefore people must believe in the leader and his or her leadership. Leaders must show integrity and be widely trusted.

4. Leveraging networks

Forming and nurturing a network of relationships is invaluable in today's interconnected world. Networking allows leaders to generate new experiences and to tap into the skills and vision of others.

5. Clear communication

Writing and speaking clearly and briefly and applying a variety of communication styles helps leaders to get the message across and to ensure the right impact.

6. Motivating others

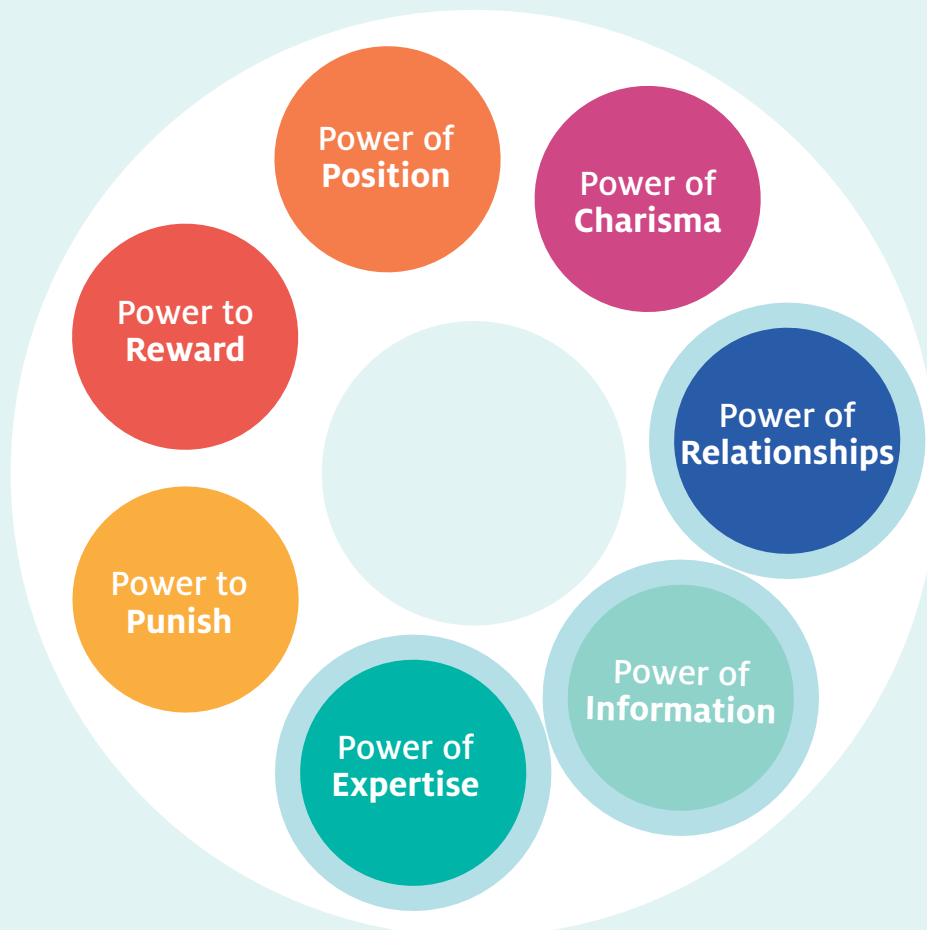
By motivating others leaders create a climate in which people become engaged and empowered. Leaders understand the needs, styles, and motivators of others. People will like working with and for those leaders and will be more receptive to their influencing.

Influencing, Manipulation, and Power

Influencing is different from manipulation. Influencing is a process and is characterized by a positive intention in the interest of the persons influenced and of the organization. Trust is at the core of the relationship between the influencer and the people influenced. The leader or person who exercises influence builds trustful relations, is transparent about the goals, the purpose, and his or her values. There is no hidden agenda, and the leader does not abuse any psychological or other weaknesses of the person who is influenced. Positive and effective influence results in alignment and commitment.

Influencing affects, shapes, or transforms opinions, behaviors, and actions. While power often is associated with control in hierarchical organizations, leaders at all levels in the organization can leverage different bases of power to influence others. CCL research shows that the **power of relationship**, the **power of information**, and the **power of expertise** are most used by leaders. These are essential for the leader to influence others, with or without formal authority.

Seven Bases of Power





Strategic Influencing

Influencing happens at all levels in the organization. For strategic leaders, the ability to influence large groups of people over whom they have no formal authority becomes even more important.

The outcome of strategic influencing has a strategic implication and happens over a longer period of time. It involves people from across and outside the organization. Strategic influencing is one of the three components of CCL's Thinking, Acting and Influencing Strategically framework.

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|------------------------------|---|
| STRATEGIC THINKING | Understanding the complex relationship between the organization and its environment. Utilizing that understanding to make decisions that facilitate the organization's enduring success. |
| STRATEGIC ACTING | Taking decisive and timely action consistent with the strategic direction of the organization, despite the ambiguity, complexity, and chaos inherent in organizational life. |
| STRATEGIC INFLUENCING | Engendering commitment to the organization's strategic direction by inviting others into the strategic process, forging relationships inside and outside the organization, and utilizing organizational culture and systems of influence. |



Mastering influencing is important for strategic leaders to design and communicate a compelling and inspiring vision of the future and to foster passion and devotion to the vision in hearts and minds. Through influencing they shape the right organizational culture, work collectively with teams on the design and the implementation of the strategy and get people aligned and committed to the vision and strategic goals. Influencing is essential to realize significant moves in the way that priorities are determined and resources are allocated. Executives attending CCL's program *Leading Strategically* mention gaining endorsement and commitment to their ideas as a key challenge to becoming a

better strategic leader. Especially in today's organizations characterized by matrix structures, cross-cultural collaboration, and remote working, leaders face new challenges while influencing others. Effective strategic leaders build networks inside and outside their organizations, involve different stakeholders and their perspectives in the design, decision, and implementation process, and leverage the organizational culture and systems. Strategic leaders also demonstrate the ability to span the boundaries in their organization, whether these are cultural, functional, demographic, or hierarchical. They have an openness to listen to ideas from others and to learn collaboratively.

Conclusion

Influencing others down, up, and across in the organization is a critical leadership skill at all levels of the organization. By convincing or persuading others, a leader can create direction, alignment, and commitment and make his or her vision or ideas happen. Effective leaders leverage the informal or formal powers they have. They combine a variety of tactics (logical, emotional, and cooperative appeals). And they have political savvy, create visibility, build and maintain personal trustworthiness, leverage networks, communicate clearly, and motivate others.

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