How to become an influential manager

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Executive Overview

Because of the increasing diversity of the goals and values of employees and their increasing interdependence, the effectiveness of formal authority is diminishing. It must be replaced with influence. In this article, we have summarized our research and that of others which have focused on managerial influence behaviors. Those tactics which are used most frequently and those which are most effective in having an impact on superiors, subordinates, and peers are discussed. Five steps which must be taken to develop and maintain managerial influence are outlined.

Article

A hospital department head attempted in vain to persuade physicians working in a large metropolitan hospital to bring patient medical records up to date. Although doctors consider this an abhorrent chore, hospitals cannot begin the billing process until each record is completed and signed by the physician. After many frustrating attempts, the department head describes how he proved equal to the challenge.

Every month we served the doctors breakfast and lunch and organized games that would allow them to win prizes. Sometimes we would place balloons on a bulletin board and let them throw darts at the balloons. At other times we would do something ridiculously child-like such as hosting a watermelon seed spitting contest or playing pin the tail on the donkey. The sessions worked beautifully because the doctors knew that when they came in someone would be there to help them and they would even have a little fun. Once when we were really desperate we hired a popular entertainer. The room was full that day and we completed over 1,000 charts.

Influence is simply the process by which people successfully persuade others to follow their advice, suggestion, or order. It can be contrasted with power which is a personal or positional attribute that enables one to influence others and which can be thought of as “continuing or sustained” influence.¹ A number of popular books have suggested that influence must replace the use of formal authority in relationships with subordinates peers, outside contacts, and others on whom the job makes one dependent.² The writers of these books attribute the need for greater influence to the rapidity of change in organizations, the diversity of people, goals and values, increasing interdependence, and the diminishing acceptability of formal authority. Bennis and Nanus have suggested that leaders must empower themselves by empowering their subordinates. Kouzes and Posner agree with this conclusion, explaining that the more people believe they can influence and control the organization, the greater will be the effectiveness of the organization. Tichy and Devanna extend this thought even further by suggesting that today we need transformational leaders who will allow networks that funnel diverse views upward from the lower level of the organization where a need for change is often first detected. Similarly, John Kotter observes that the increasing diversity and interdependence of organizational role players is creating a ”power gap” for managers who often have knowledge and good ideas for organizations but who have inadequate authority to implement their ideas.

¹ Bennis and Nanus
² A number of popular books
Recently managers have begun to view leadership as the orchestration of relationships between several different interest groups—superiors, peers, and outsiders, as well as subordinates. Effectiveness at leadership requires balance in terms of efforts spent in building relationships in these four directions. Good relationships in one direction can often be leveraged to obtain influence in another.

For example, effectiveness with subordinates has been found to depend heavily on the ability to develop upward influence with superiors. Influence with the boss often depends on the ability to accomplish things through one’s subordinates. Laterally, managers must spend time in group meetings, interorganizational negotiations, and in bids for departmental resources. This is a role replete with power gaps. Most assuredly lateral relationships require the ability to influence without formal authority representatives with unions, customers, and government, or highly autonomous professionals such as the physician in our introductory example.

The concept of “linking groups” seems to drive the middle manager’s work while both middle management and executive levels are heavily engaged in “coordinating” independent groups. In this latter role, they must persuade other organizational groups to provide information, products, resources needed, and negotiate working agreements with other groups. Additionally, executive levels of management must frequently maintain relationships with management-level vendors, consultants, and other boundary-spanning agents through outside meetings. Recent research suggests that the “ambassador role” of “representing one’s staff” is vitally important to all levels of management. It consists of developing relationships with other work groups and negotiating for information and resources on behalf of the manager’s own group.

Building on the previous thoughts and the research of others, we conducted field studies to collect incidents, similar to the one describing the hospital department head, and used these to analyze how managers build and sustain influence. This article explains our research findings and those of related studies for managers who wish to become more influential with subordinates, superiors, peers, and other target groups.

Influence Tactic Research

Only a few writers have identified influence tactics from research investigations. David Kipnis and his colleagues asked evening graduate students to describe an incident in which they actually succeeded in getting either their boss, a coworker, or a subordinate to do something they wanted. Their analysis revealed that the tactics of ingratiating (making the supervisor feel important) and developing rational plans were the most frequently used methods to influence superiors. When attempting to influence subordinates, respondents most often used formal authority, training, and explanations. Only one tactic, that of requesting help, was frequently associated with influencing coworkers.

Our studies were aimed at strengthening the previous research. Since the studies cited above utilized categories of influence tactics derived from research with MBA students, we developed categories from influence incidents collected from practicing managers. Our three studies used trained students from several universities and structured interview forms to collect a wide geographic dispersion of responses.

Attempts were made to collect one successful incident and one unsuccessful incident from managers in a wide variety of both large and small businesses. One
study focused on lateral influence processes, another on upward influence processes, and a third study examined downward influence. The primary question asked of each manager was, "Please think of a time when you successfully/unsuccessfully tried to influence a (superior, peer, or subordinate) toward the attainment of a personal, group, or organizational goal . . . Please tell exactly what happened."

Exhibit 1 presents the summary of findings from these studies.¹⁰

The numbers to the right of each tactic portray the rank order of the frequency with which influence tactics were reported for each target group.

**Influencing Superiors**

In influence attempts with superiors and peers, rational explanations were the most frequently used tactic. Often these techniques included the presentation of a complete plan, a comparative or quantitative analysis, or documentation of an idea or plan by way of survey, incidents, or interviews. In a few isolated cases, subordinates challenged their superiors’ power, tried to manipulate them, bargained for influence, or threatened to quit. When these more assertive techniques were used, the subordinate was successful about 50 percent of the time—not very good odds for the risks which they were taking. In most narratives we found that the subordinate using these methods had discovered a powerless boss, or had developed an unusual position of power themselves by becoming indispensable. In a few cases they had simply become frustrated and thrown caution to the wind.

Upward influence tactics were characterized by numerous supporting tactics such as mustering the support of a variety of other persons (both internal and external to the organization) or by choosing appropriate timing to approach the boss. Only two tactics appeared with significant enough frequency differential to be clearly distinguished as a successful or unsuccessful tactic. Subordinates using the tactic of “talking to or arguing with the boss without support” were more likely to fail. On the other hand, those who continued persistently or repeatedly an influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boss</th>
<th>Peers</th>
<th>Subordinates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presenting a rational explanation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling, arguing, or talking without support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presenting a complete plan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using persistence or repetition</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing and showing support of others (employees, outsiders, etc.)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using others as a platform to present ideas</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presenting an example of a parallel situation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Threatening</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offering to trade favors or concessions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using manipulative techniques</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calling on formal authority and policies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Showing confidence and support</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delegating duties, guidelines, or goals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening, counseling, or soliciting ideas</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questioning, reviewing, or evaluating</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rewarding with status or salary</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing friendship or trust</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
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Exhibit 1. Rank of Frequency With Which Each Influence Tactic Was Reported By Target Groups
attempt continuously were likely to succeed. Caution is in order, however, in interpreting the use of persistence and repetition; this was usually a secondary tactic used in combination with others such as presenting facts and rational plans.

The rational persuasion technique was used by a plant manager to prevent a cutback in his work force when the army phased out one of its tanks.

First the plant manager sold a new product line to divisional staff who reported to his boss. In the meantime he developed a presentation in the form of a comparative analysis showing the pros and cons of taking on the new product line. Ideas presented included such things as the reduced burden on other products, risk reward factors, and good community relations from the layoff avoided. The presentation was polished, written on viewgraphs, and presented in person. The plant manager made certain that his technical staff would be at the meeting ready to answer any questions that might damage the strength of the presentation.

Not only did the plant manager succeed with this influence attempt, he felt that his boss and peers were easier to convince on subsequent attempts.

Influencing Subordinates
When dealing with subordinates, of course, the manager may simply tell an employee to do something. But our research suggests that managers who rely on formal authority alone are greatly limiting their options. The power gap noted earlier exists with subordinates as well as with other groups. Today more than ever, it must be filled with methods of influence other than authority. The following incident presents an interesting view of a furniture manufacturer trying to persuade his upholstery foreman to accept the position of plant superintendent.

The manager met with Foreman Z in the foreman’s office for short periods to talk about the promotion. Anticipating resistance, he covered small increments of the superintendent’s responsibilities and allowed the foreman time to think about each session. The manager made sure that each session ended on a positive note. He pointed out the many tasks and skills required of the superintendent’s job were already inherent in the foreman position. He downplayed the more complex responsibilities, relying on his commitment to future training to resolve these. Several such meetings took place in a five-day period. On one occasion the foreman alluded to resentment from fellow foremen. This prompted the manager to enlist the help of some of the other foremen—several hunting buddies, to talk favorably about Z taking the position. In the last meeting the manager outlined the responsibilities and cited the salary and prestige which accompanied the position.

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The senior manager in this incident later commented that he had always had success at using this technique—that is, breaking down a complex influence task into incremental steps and attacking each step separately. While there is some merit to this process, most readers would agree that the major reason for success in this case was the persistence exerted by the senior manager to win in his influence attempt. The mild deception in over-simplifying the open position could merit criticism but must be moderated by the manager’s willingness to train and support the foreman. In this case, the influence tactic had positive long-term consequences; the foreman became a very successful plant superintendent and later trained his own successor.

As expected, managers often use the tactic of explaining (policies, tasks, benefits) or delegating assignments when attempting to influence subordinates.
Frequently they showed confidence, encouragement, or support when trying to win subordinates over. The use of reason or facts often came in the form of a suggestion of a superior procedure or an example. Managers often counseled with subordinates or solicited their ideas to influence them.

Frequently, subordinates were questioned, reviewed, evaluated, threatened, warned, reprimanded, or embarrassed to change their minds or to solicit compliance with plans of the superior. These more threatening and negative techniques were more frequently associated with failure than success. Occasionally subordinates were transferred or relocated to influence them, but usually with little success. The more assertive tactics were typically used in cases where subordinates were initially reluctant to comply with reasonable requests or had violated policies or procedures.

**Influencing Peers**

Only one tactic from our lateral influence study was noted significantly more often in successful influence attempts with peers—that of “developing and showing support of others.” This tactic was most often used along with others and therefore represented a part of a multiple influence tactic. Often a peer in a staff department or a subordinate is used to support a proposal, as in the influence attempt described by a zone manager with a large tire and rubber company.

**During this time I was managing 25 company-owned stores in which I initiated an effective program to control the handling of defective merchandise. I wanted to see the method utilized by the other store managers throughout the country who were supervised by other zone managers, but I felt that they would consider me to be intruding if I approached them directly. Therefore, I asked my store managers to tell the store managers in other zones about the sizeable savings to be had from the use of the method. The other store managers told their zone managers and soon they came to me for information about my program. The new program saved the company $90,000, per year which increased our pay in bonuses at the end of the year.**

When dealing with peers, managers made extensive use of rational facts or ideas. They often presented an example of another organization using their idea or proposal. Demonstrating that they had the support of others was a frequently used managerial influence tactic. Occasionally they threatened to go to higher level management or called on formal authority or policies to support their case. Assertive and manipulative tactics were used more often when attempting to influence the boss or subordinates, but less frequently with peers.

**Influence Tactic Effectiveness**

Our research on individual influence attempts somewhat simplifies the area of influence effectiveness. In the first place, the methods listed in Exhibit 1 are the ones that are most frequently used and not necessarily the ones which are most successful. In all three studies we found that techniques that succeed in some instances fail in others. The few exceptions to this finding are noted in Exhibit 1 when the ranks of tactics are underlined. These represent tactics that were reported significantly more often, for either successful or unsuccessful influence attempts. For example, unsuccessful influence attempts with the boss often consisted of simply telling the boss something, arguing, or presenting an idea or suggestion without support. While this technique occasionally succeeded, it was more likely to be associated with unsuccessful episodes. Similarly, the use of persistence or repetition was reported more often in successful influence attempts with the boss than with unsuccessful ones.

Judging from the incidents collected, subordinate influence tactics of “threatening or questioning, reviewing, or evaluating” are significantly more likely to lead to
failure than to success. Consider the experience of a plant operations manager attempting to introduce quality circles in an area to improve productivity.

The operations manager requested the assistance of the manager of organizational development, who warned that such implementation would take time, patience and the building of trust among his employees. Turnover in the operations area was high and negative attitudes tended to prevail. The operations manager became impatient, viewing QC as a quick fix for morale problems. The OD manager made available several persons who had worked successfully with a QC implementation, but after conversing with them the operations manager elected not to listen. He chose two subordinates to be trained as QC facilitators and immediately upon the completion of their training, began to implement QC.

The operations manager and facilitators subtly coerced employees to join the circles and directed them toward the projects that management wanted attacked. After several months employee interest fell sharply and several complaints were filed with employee relations leading to abandonment of the project.

Contrast this occurrence with a less threatening attempt reported by a manufacturing manager in another part of the country:

The manager first read numerous articles about QC programs and learned the pitfalls to avoid. QC information handouts were given to the supervisors over a period of a couple of months. The supervisors were never pressured and gradually they approached their manager, asking how they could get quality circles started in their departments. The program was then implemented using recognized procedures and is still operating successfully several years later.

The analysis of influence attempts such as the quality circles’ incidents demonstrates the need for careful implementation of management processes.

Steps in Becoming an Influential Manager

Power, or sustained influence, may be accumulated and stored by a manager for future use. This allows one to call on existing strength to bolster influence tactics and often affects the future choice of influence tactic. Power may also be provided by the strategic position that one occupies in an organization, but position is often beyond the control of the incumbent. Fortunately, power may also be acquired through the development and exercise of certain skills by the manager within the organization. It is this skill-based power that we discuss throughout the rest of this article.11

Our research, and that of other writers reviewed in this article, indicates that there are five key steps to establishing sustained managerial influence.

- Develop a reputation as a knowledgeable person or an expert.
- Balance the time spent in each critical relationship according to the needs of the work rather than on the basis of habit or social preference.
- Develop a network of resource persons who can be called upon for assistance.
- Choose the correct combination of influence tactics for the objective and for the target to be influenced.
- Implement influence tactics with sensitivity, flexibility, and adequate levels of communication.

These steps in developing influence might be compared to the development of a "web of influence" (no negative implication intended). Unlike the web of a spider, the manager's web of influence can be mutually advantageous to all who interact within it. The web is anchored by a bridgeline of knowledge and expertise. The structure of the web is extended when invested time is converted into a network of resource persons who may be called upon for information and special assistance.
Managers who possess expert knowledge in a field and who continually build that knowledge base are in a position to convert successful attempts into sustained power.

Our research suggests that the web of influence is continually in a state of construction. It is often broken or weakened by an ill-chosen influence attempt requiring patch-up work for a portion of the web. Some webs are constructed poorly, haphazardly or incompletely like the tangled web of a common house spider, while others are constructed with a beautiful symmetrical pattern like the one of the orb weaver.

Develop a Reputation as an Expert
Of all the influence tactics mentioned by respondents in our interviews, the use of rational facts and explanations was the most commonly reported—although in isolation this method succeeded no more often than it failed. Managers who possess expert knowledge in a field and who continually build that knowledge base are in a position to convert successful attempts into sustained power. In the early stages of a career (or shortly after a move) power from expertise is usually tentative and fragile like the first strands of a web. Hampton and colleagues explain how expertise is extended to become sustained influence with the following example of Bill, a young staff specialist, hired to provide expertise to a number of production managers:

Initially, the only influence process available to the specialist is persuasion—gaining the rational agreement of the managers. To be effective he prepares elaborate, clear presentations (even rehearsing with a colleague to anticipate any questions). By data, logic, and argument, he attempts to gain the agreement of his superiors. After a year of this kind of relationship, he goes one day to talk with Barbara, one of the managers. An hour has been reserved for the presentation. He arrives and begins his pitch. After a couple of minutes, however, the busy manager interrupts: "I'm just too busy to go over this. We'll do whatever you want to do."12

But enhancing expert-based power involves publicizing one's expertise as well as acquiring it. For example, Kotter contrasts two 35-year-old vice presidents in a large research and development organization, who are considered equally bright and technically competent.

Close friends and associates claim the reason that Randley is so much more powerful is related to a number of tactics that he has used more than Kline has. Randley has published more scientific papers and managerial articles than Kline. Randley has been more selective in the assignments he has worked on, choosing those that are visible and that require his strong suits. He has given more speeches and presentations on projects that are his own achievements. And in meetings in general, he is allegedly forceful in areas where he has expertise and silent in those where he does not.13

Balance Time With Each Critical Relationship
Managers who desire to become influential must strike a reasonable balance in the investment of their time. In another study using a questionnaire, we surveyed managers from the United States, Korea, Hong Kong, and the Philippines to learn how they spent their time. These managers say that they spend about 10 percent of their time interacting with the boss, approximately 30 percent interacting with subordinates, and about 20 percent interacting with peers. As one might expect, the pattern of outside relations varies with the job (i.e., sales, engineering, etc.),
but the managers report, on the average, spending from 15–20 percent of their time with external contacts. Time spent alone varies from 15–26 percent.\textsuperscript{14} Although we cannot argue that this pattern is descriptive of all managers, it is similar to the pattern of communication distribution discovered from a sample of United States managers by Luthans and Larson.\textsuperscript{15}

Some popular writers are calling for a heavy rescheduling of time and communications efforts.\textsuperscript{16} Peters argues that 75 percent of a middle manager’s time must be spent on horizontal relationships to speed up cross-functional communications in the middle of organizations. Johnson and Frostman see this kind of communication as being so critical that it must be mandated by upper level management. Peters emphasizes the argument that upper level managers spend too little time visiting with customers or in face-to-face relationships with subordinates (management by walking around). The bottom line is that time should be spent where influence is most needed to accomplish organizational goals.\textsuperscript{17}

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During our seminars on influence over the years, managers have often told us that they failed to spend enough time with the boss or with peers, or in simply keeping up with organizational happenings. This may be due to the fact that many managers are uncomfortable spending time with those who have more formal power than they, (superiors), or with those with whom they must compete, (peers). Sayles believes that managers’ uneasiness with peers grows out of the difference in values across departments and work groups, the ambiguities which exist in cross-organizational relationships, and the conflict often generated in lateral relationships.\textsuperscript{18} Other things being equal, realigning from a narrow focus on subordinates to a bigger picture which includes lateral and upward relationships can often yield a stronger web of sustained influence and should provide the supporting spokes needed to launch influence tactics.

A strong web of influence may even be quite desirable from the boss’s viewpoint. Schilit found that managers who had been working for the same upper manager for a long period of time were quite capable of influencing that manager even on strategic issues facing the company. He concludes that: ”(Managers) should be encouraged to be assertive in presenting their strategic thoughts because widespread strategic thinking may have a positive impact on their division or organization.”\textsuperscript{19}

**Develop a Network of Resource Persons**

Although managers do not use other people in most influence attempts, the more important attempts invariably involve others. For example, in the incident cited earlier about the furniture manufacturer who wanted a foreman to accept the plant manager’s job, the assistance of other foremen (fishing buddies) was solicited. Similarly, in the case of the plant manager who tried to avoid a cutback in his work force after the phaseout of a military contract, the manager sold his idea to division staff and ensured that his own technical staff would be in attendance at the meeting in which he was making a presentation to the boss. The ability to establish and exploit a network is clearly demonstrated by a branch manager of a bank who used the following tactic with his superior, a vice president, when he found his operation in need of additional space.

*My strategy was to convince my immediate superior that the current facilities were too small to not only handle the current volume of business, but too small to allow us to increase our share of the market in a rapidly growing area. First, I persuaded my superior to visit the branch more often, especially at times when the branch was particularly busy. I also solicited accounting’s help to provide statistical reports on a regular basis that communicated the amount of overall growth in the area as well as the growth of our competitors. These reports showed that our market share was increasing. I then asked my superior to visit with me as*
I called on several customers and prospects in the area to let him know the type of potential business in the area. During this period of time, I kept pushing to increase all levels of business at the branch. Finally, I encouraged key customers in the bank to say favorable things about my branch when they visited with my senior managers. Eventually my superior got behind my proposal and we were able to build an addition to the building which allowed me to add several new employees.

Such influence attempts clearly illustrate the fact that many managers do not assume that achievement in traditional areas of management—selling, organizing, promoting customers—will inspire sufficient confidence by others. Rather than waiting for good publicity and resources to come to them, they seek them out through influence approaches built on carefully planned networks and persistent effort. The findings of our influence studies are supported by the observations of Luthans and his colleagues who concluded that managers who are both effective (have satisfied and committed subordinates and high performance in their units) and successful (receive relatively rapid promotions) strike a balanced approach between networking, human resource management, communications, and traditional management activities.\(^2\)

To some extent, networking activities may affect the positional strength of managers. The more contacts a manager has with others and the more independent the position relative to others, the more control the manager has over the flow of information. Positions that involve interaction with more influential managers of the organization or control information on which they rely, will typically be ones of power.\(^21\)

Kaplan compares the strengthening of lateral relationships in the organization to the establishment of trade routes in international trade. According to this writer, managers, unlike countries which trade products, often trade power and the ability to get things done. Their goal is to build strong reciprocal relationships with other departments so that when the manager has immediate needs sufficient obligation exists to ensure fast cooperation. Often positions on the boundary of an organization can be especially influential. Consider the example referred to by Kaplan when describing a newly appointed manager of corporate employee relations. "I wanted a base that was different from what the groups reporting to me had and also from what my superiors had, so I established a series of contacts in other American industries until I knew on a first-name basis my counterpart at IBM, TRW, Proctor & Gamble, DuPont, and General Electric, and I could get their input—input which the people in my organization didn't have."\(^22\) Kaplan suggests that networks of trading partners can be built by rotating jobs frequently, establishing strong friendships (and maintaining them), and seeking commonality with other managers, such as a shared work history.

Choose the Correct Combination of Influence Tactics

Influence tactics are the threads that complete a web, hold the spokes of the webbed network in place, and in turn are supported by the network. They must be chosen carefully on the basis of influence targets chosen and objectives sought.\(^23\) One of the studies by Kipnis and colleagues found, as did we, that considerably more approaches were used to influence subordinates than were used to influence superiors or peers. Incidents in our studies suggested that most first influence attempts by managers involved soft approaches such as requests or reason, but later attempts included stronger tactics when the target of influence was reluctant to comply. This notion was confirmed statistically in the Kipnis study. Both superior and subordinate target groups in the Kipnis sample tended to use reason to sell ideas and friendliness to obtain favors. These authors also emphasize that influence tactics must vary with the target and objective of influence attempts: "only the most inflexible of managers can be expected to rely
rigidly on a single strategy, say assertiveness, to achieve both personal and organizational objectives. It may be appropriate to 'insist' that one's boss pay more attention to cost overruns; it is less appropriate to 'insist' on time off for a game of golf.\textsuperscript{24}

Taking a cue from the fact that few tactics were found to be associated more frequently with success than failure in any of our studies, we began to examine combinations of influence tactics. In each of the three influence studies (upward, downward, and lateral), managers who used a combination of approaches tended more often to be successful than managers who relied on a single tactic.

Complex and vital influence attempts, such as those required for major strategies or new projects, always require multiple influence tactics. A successful attempt is likely to begin with homework to gather facts, a citation of parallel examples (who is doing this?), a marshalling of support of others (perhaps insured by an effective web of influence), precise timing and packaging of a presentation, and, in the case of initial resistance, persistence and repetition over weeks or even months. Less frequently, but sometimes successfully, managers may resort to manipulation, threats, or pulling rank.\textsuperscript{25}

We noted that in many incidents short term success seemed to lead to enhanced influence in the long term, therefore, we sought ways to measure sustained influence over time. Consequently, in our downward influence study, we asked managers about the nature of the subordinate-superior relationship that occurred two months following an influence attempt. As we expected, successful influence attempts led the managers to perceive that their relationships had improved and to believe they had expanded their potential for future influence. For example, the bank branch manager, who was able to enlarge his building reported that because of his success with the influence attempt his profile at the bank was raised, that he was given a promotion and a raise, and that he was transferred to the main office.

Although we cannot be certain that the managers experiencing short-term influence success derived power with their boss from these episodes, the fact that managers believed this to be so caused them, in most cases, to plan additional influence attempts. These findings are supported by a study by Kipnis and his colleagues which found that managers who perceive that they have power are more likely to select assertive influence tactics.\textsuperscript{26} Failures at influence attempts may cause managers to plan fewer future attempts and to experience a period of weakened relationships with the boss. Frequently when a subordinate attempts to influence upper level management in a manner where his or her intention is clearly for the advantage of the organization, failure is not damaging to future influence. When the purpose of an influence attempt is clearly seen as a personal goal, failure may be more serious. Such a case was reported by a supervisor of security services dealing with a vice president of operations:

\textit{I wanted an assistant so that I could have some help in managing my department and would not have to handle petty problems of my employees. I tried to convince my boss that I was overworked since my staff has almost doubled and I was having a lot of people problems. I failed because I was just trying to make it easier on myself and wanted an assistant to do the job that I was supposed to be doing. I was also asking to increase the payroll of the company with no plans to increase revenue or profits. After my boss turned me down, I pouted for a few weeks and later learned that my boss thought I was immature. I then decided to forget about past disappointments and only worry about the future.}
Communicate Influence Tactics Effectively
It is very difficult to separate influence tactic choice with the communications process itself. Cohen and Bradford stress the importance of knowing the world of potential allies—the needs, values, and organizational forces working on them. For example, they suggest that setting the stage for an influence attempt by winning and dining influence targets at a fancy restaurant may work well for a public relations director, but may appear to be a buy-out attempt when directed toward the head of engineering.27

Many of our research participants mentioned the importance of their presentation or their manner of approaching the target. Managers who choose rational ideas based on the needs of the target, wrap them with a blanket of humor or anecdotes, and cast them in the language of the person to be influenced, are much more likely to see their influence objective achieved.

Effective communications become interwoven coils of silk in the web of influence that help ensure the success of tactics. Consider for example the combination of influence tactics and communication used by Lococo in his turn-a-round strategy of Chrysler. Kotter capsules these as follows: "He developed a bold new vision of what Chrysler should be...he (then) attracted, held onto, and elicited cooperation and teamwork from a large network...labor leaders, a whole new management team, dealers, suppliers, some key government officials and many others. He did so by articulating his agenda in emotionally powerful ways ('Remember, folks, we have a responsibility to save 600,000 jobs'), by using the credibility and relationships he had developed after a long and highly successful career in the automotive business, by communicating the new strategies in an intellectually, powerful manner and in still other ways."28

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Upward and lateral communications require more listening and more appreciation of the ideas and thoughts of others than dictated by subordinate relationships. Laborde suggests that a person who would master the communicator part of influence must see more and hear more than most people and must remain flexible to vary their behavior in response to what they see and hear.29 Kaplan strongly emphasizes the importance of variation in the arsenal of communications skills—knowing when to meet with a person face-to-face, when to call group meetings, and when to use memos.30

Implications of Influence Research For Managers
No research is subtle enough to capture all of the relationships present between managers as they work together as peers, subordinates, and superiors. While incident- or questionnaire-type research may be subject to some self-report bias (if possible managers try to make themselves look rational to the researcher), observers, even if they could remain long enough in an area, could never capture and connect all of the thoughts necessary to precisely determine motives, processes, and outcomes of managers attempting to develop long-term influence relationships. We have attempted to capture some of the pieces, reviewed the best of what other experts have said about the subject, and tried to establish some connections. While recognizing these limitations, our influence research over the past ten years leads us to the following conclusions.

• Managers are continually in a state of building and extending webs of influence and repairing damaged threads. With every career change new webs must be built. In the early part of a career or after a career move, a manager must establish a web of influence by developing a reputation as an expert, balancing this with key influence targets, networking to establish resources, and selecting and communicating appropriate influence tactics.
• No one influence tactic can be isolated as being superior to others. Tactics must be chosen on the basis of the influence target and objective sought. For more
important influence objectives, a combination of influence tactics will be necessary.

- Frequency of reported tactic usage suggests that most contemporary managers initially try positive techniques with targets, but will quickly resort to threats or manipulation if necessary, especially if the target is a subordinate.
- The variety of approaches used to influence subordinates is wider than suggested by the traditional leadership models and wider than the variety used in upward and lateral influence attempts. This appears to be due not only to the additional power bases available when dealing with subordinates, but also to the growing difficulty of obtaining subordinate compliance through traditional means.
- Contrary to traditional views that networking outside the hierarchy is disruptive, today’s leaders must recognize the value of reciprocal influence relationships and must encourage them as long as they can be fruitfully directed toward organizational goals. Webs of influence may provide advantages for all involved.
- For these reasons, we are quite convinced that influential managers are ones who have developed and maintained a balanced web of relationships with the boss, subordinates, peers, and other key players; influence in each of these directions is banked for leverage to accomplish goals in the other directions. If knowledge alone and positional authority alone will not accomplish the manager’s job, those who would be influential must fill power gaps with webs of influence.

Endnotes


3 For the review of literature and our conceptualization of an influence model, see J.B. Keys and R. Bell, "The Four Faces of the Fully Functioning Middle Manager," California Management Review, 24 (4), Summer 1982, 59-66; a condensed version of this article can be found in World Executive's Digest, 4 (7), 1983, 25-31.


5 For the review of the way in which managers create influence downward, see
6 For a discussion of how managers develop political skills, see Ruello, Endnote 5 and Uytterhoeven, Endnote 4. To review the integrative role of middle managers, see J.L. Hall and J.K. Leidecker, "Lateral Relations: The Impact on the Modern Managerial Role," Industrial Management, June 1974, 3.  
9 For other studies on influence tactics see: D. Kipnis, S.M. Schmidt and I. Wilkinson, "Interorganizational Influence Tactics: Explorations in Getting One's Way," Journal of Applied Psychology, 65 (4), August 1980, 440-452. This study differed from our field study in that it surveyed evening MBA students and allowed them to describe any successful influence episode in which they had been involved. W.K. Schilit and E.A. Locke, "A Study of Upward Influence in Organizations," Administrative Science Quarterly, 1982, 27 (2), 304-316 found that Kipnis and Schilit's fourteen tactic categories were not sufficient to categorize upward influence incident accounts collected from undergraduate and graduate business students and full-time employees or supervisors. They found evidence supporting the use of 20 tactics of upward influence tactics. Because these previous investigations relied so heavily on unchallenged global categories derived from a relatively small sample of evening MBA students which might not be representative of managers, we began our studies from scratch and collected narrative accounts of incidents from practicing managers. Each study focused on only one type of target and at least 250 influence tactics were collected. Flamagnon's critical incident method was used to develop categories and to content analyze the responses. (J.C. Flamagnon, "Defining the Requirements of the Executive's Job," Personnel, 29, July, 1951, 28-35.) Our findings for upward influence were more similar to those of Schilit and Locke than to those of Kipnis et al. Over 46 distinct tactics were observed across the three types of targets. Of course, tactics used to influence some targets are rarely, if ever, used to influence other types of targets. The description of managerial influence tactics which emerges from our three studies is much more detailed and therefore more suited to management applications than that provided by the previous investigations. Of equal importance, unlike the previous studies, our investigations also addressed the use of combinations of tactics via a single tactic, and the long term consequences of the influence attempt for the initiator and the organization.  
12 See Endnote 1, p. 35  
13 See Kotter in Endnote 2, p. 35.  
19 For a discussion of why managers should encourage their subordinates to influence them, see W.K. Schilit, "An Examination of Individual Differences as Moderators of Upward Influence Activity in Strategic Decisions," Human Relations, 30 (10), 1985, 948. The author's final paragraph, reprinted from this empirical study lend support to the suggestions about transformational leaders by Tichy and Devana and Kotter in Endnote 2.


See Kaplan Endnote 17 above.

For an excellent treatment of the objectives and targets of influence, see D. Kipnis S. Schmidt, C. Swaffin-Smith, and I. Wilkinson, "Patterns of Managerial Influence: Shotgun Managers, Tacticians, and Bystanders," *Organizational Dynamics*, 12 (3), 1984, 58-67 and Kipnis, et al., 1980, Endnote 9 above. These studies and the Erez, et al study noted below also used a common questionnaire and a similar factor analysis to find broader categories of influence in which individual influence tactics (similar to those in exhibit 1) fall. The categories derived include:

Reason: The use of facts & data to support logical arguments.

Manipulation: The use of impression management, flattery, or ingratiolation.

Coalitions: Obtaining the support of other people in the organization.

Bargaining: The use of negotiation and exchange of benefits or favors.

Assertiveness: Demanding or acting in a forceful manner.

Upward Appeal: Making an appeal to higher levels of management in the organization to back up requests.


See D. Kipnis, et al, Endnote 23 above, p. 32.


See D. Kipnis, et al, in Endnote 23, p. 32.


See Endnote 17 above, p. 32.


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**About the Authors**

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Thomas L. Case is currently an associate professor and acting head of the Department of Management at Georgia Southern University. He obtained a Ph.D. in social psychology at the University of Georgia and has attended both the basic and advanced MIS Faculty Development Institutes sponsored by the AACSBI. In addition to managerial influence tactics, his main research and publications have been in the areas of organization development, R & D information systems, and program evaluation for supported employment and other services for developmentally disabled workers. He has been a member of the Academy of Management and Southern Management Association since 1982. He has been proceedings editor and is currently treasurer for the International Academy for Information Management (IAIM).