

# Influencing Without Authority

## Using Reciprocity to Gain Influence

*(The Cohen-Bradford Influence Model)*

A project manager's job requires her to influence stakeholders just about all of the time. Influencing may take the form of softly ensuring that tasks are being done as scheduled, giving support, persuading others to not only come around to your point of view but to become your advocates, inspiring others, engaging someone's imagination and above all creating positive and productive relationships. Such relationships help run our own projects smoothly. They also help us personally and professionally.

But how do you influence stakeholders? In particular, how do you influence stakeholders in a typical matrix organisation where project managers have no line management authority over their team members? Are there any research findings that project managers can leverage to improve their influencing outcomes?

The short answer is yes. There is a well regarded model of influencing without authority called the Cohen-Bradford Influence Model. Before we examine this model, we should clear the deck with a clarification: who exactly is a stakeholder?

According to 'A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide, Fourth Edition)', stakeholders "are persons or organisations (e.g., customers, sponsors, the performing organisation, or the public) who are actively involved in the project and whose interests may be positively or negatively affected by the performance or completion of the project. Stakeholders may also exert influence over the project, its deliverables, and the project team members".

We are now ready to consider how we can use the Cohn-Bradford Influence Model when we need help from other people.

## About The Influence Model

The Influence Model, also known as the Cohen-Bradford Influence Model, was created by Allen R. Cohen and David L. Bradford, both leadership experts and eminent academicians. The model was originally published in their 2005 book, "Influence Without Authority."

Cohen and Bradford believe that authority does not ensure that you will get support and commitment from your subordinates. Authority can create fear thereby having people acting for a short time and for the wrong reasons. As Dwight Eisenhower said "I would rather try to persuade a man to go along, because once I have persuaded him, he will stick. If I scare him, he will stay just as long as he is scared, and then he is gone". That is why it is all the more important to learn how to influence others without using authority.

The essence of Influence Model is the law of reciprocity - the belief that all of the positive and negative things we do for (or to) others will be paid back over time.

For example, if you give your peer a hand in resolving a difficult situation, you might expect, perhaps subconsciously, that he will somehow return the favour in the future.

## Using the Model

You will find that the Influence Model is useful whenever:

- You don't know the other person well.
- You need help from someone over whom you have no authority.
- You don't have a good relationship with the person from whom you need help.

Cohen and Bradford have laid out six steps. These are:

1. Assume all are potential allies.
2. Clarify your goals and priorities.
3. Diagnose the world of the other person.
4. Identify relevant "currencies"; theirs, and yours.
5. Deal with relationships.
6. Influence through give and take.

As in case of any other model, experience tells us that once you become familiar with the model, it would not be necessary to step through it mechanically.

Let's consider each step, and think about how to apply the model in a real life situation:

### 1. Assume All are Potential Allies

It is easy to see why most people would feel somewhat troubled and nervous at the prospect of influencing someone who they hardly know. This model cautions against writing anyone off; approach this scenario by considering the other person as a potential ally.

### 2. Clarify Your Goals and Priorities

In this step you need to establish why you are trying to influence this person. What exactly is it that you need from them?

A word of caution: it is essential to keep your personal desires and goals out of the situation. For instance, you may be the sort of person that always wishes to have the "last word." Such personal habits can get in the way of effective influencing. Focus on your work goals.

### 3. Diagnose the World of the Other Person

This step requires you to understand your potential ally's world, including understanding how she is judged. For instance, how are they rewarded? What seems to be important to them?

This enables you to understand what your ally can give, and what she might want from you in return.

Following questions will help you make your assessment:

- How is this person "rewarded" at work?
- What does this person's boss expect from her?
- What are this person's primary responsibilities?
- Does the culture of this person's organization encourage helping others?
- Does this person experience peer pressure from her colleagues?

Key idea here is to understand what drives your ally's behaviour.

This step can be demanding. It will help you determine this person's relevant "currency", which is the next step.

## 4. Identify Relevant "Currencies"; Theirs and Yours

This is probably the most important step in the Influence Model. Here, you need to identify what your potential ally truly values.

Active listening would enable you to understand the currency that this person values most.

In their book, Cohen and Bradford identify five types of currency that are most often valued in organizations. These are:

1. Inspiration-related currencies.
2. Task-related currencies.
3. Position-related currencies.
4. Relationship-related currencies.
5. Personal-related currencies.

### a. Inspiration-Related Currencies

These currencies are all related to inspiration and morality. People who value these currencies look for meaning in what they do. They would go out of their way to help you if they feel that it's the right thing to do, or if it contributes in some way to a cause that they value.

You can influence these people by explaining the significance of your request, and by showing that it's the right thing to do.

### b. Task-Related Currencies

These currencies relate to getting the job done.

Here, you'll want to exchange resources such as personnel. You could offer to help these people on a current project that they may be struggling with. Or you could offer your expertise, or your unit/organization's expertise, in exchange for their help.

Note that an important task-related currency is challenge. Many people, especially those who want to expand their skills, look out for the opportunity to work on challenging tasks.

### c. Position-Related Currencies

People who value this currency focus on recognition and visibility. They want to race up the organizational hierarchy.

You'll want to respond to this desire for recognition by publicly acknowledging their efforts. You could persuade them that the task would be recognized by respected people in your organization and publicised in newsletter.

### d. Relationship-Related Currencies

People who value relationships wish to belong. They crave strong relationships with their team and colleagues.

It is essential to make these people feel they're connected to you or your project on a personal level. Use active listening to offer them emotional support and appreciation. Say "thank you" at all opportunities.

## e. Personal-Related Currencies

This is probably the simplest of all currencies. These currencies relate to the other person on a personal level.

You can appeal to this person by showing them sincere gratitude for their help. Give them the freedom to make their own decisions if they're helping you on a team. Make sure that they don't feel hassled helping you.

## 5. Deal with Relationships

In this step you need to think through what kind of relationship you have with this person. If you know her well and you're on good terms, you can directly ask her for what you need.

If you're not on good terms, or you're a complete stranger, then you need to focus on building trust and building a good relationship before you ask for help.

Take time to get to know this person. Ideally, as the saying goes 'you need to dig the well long before you feel thirsty'. You need to consciously take steps to build bridges across to various people in the organisation. Once you do so you would find that working in the organisation progressively becomes more pleasurable as relationships start to build across individuals.

You will also find that softer skills such as active listening and emotional intelligence will help you build virtuous networks of relationships. These relationships will make it progressively easier to achieve outcomes.

## 6. Influence Through Give and Take

Once you think you know what your ally wants or needs, and you've determined what you have to offer in return, you can make "the exchange" and put your findings into action.

It is incredibly important to make sure that when you make the offer or exchange, it's done in a way that builds trust. Show respect and understanding to the other person. Be profuse in your gratitude to them for helping you, and keep looking for ways to help them as well as others. Remember about digging the well before you get thirsty...

### Example

Peter has been working in the IT department of his organisation for two years. Peter has been involved in many small projects in his department and believes that he is now ready to take on a bigger project. However Peter also feels that he does not have the confidence of his boss Rachael. This feeling is due to the numerous, relatively low level questions that Rachael asks of Peter regularly.

The problem is that while Peter has been busy working on the smaller components of the larger projects that Rachael has been tackling, Rachael has also been very busy. As a result Peter is uncertain if he has Rachael's support for him to take on larger projects. So, Peter uses the Influence Model, as follows:

### 1. Assume All are Potential Allies

Peter already knows that Rachael could be an ally; their interaction with each other has been positive enough. It is just that given Rachael's modus operandi, Peter has not felt confident enough to speak to her about taking on larger projects.

### 2. Clarify Your Goals and Priorities

Peter takes a few minutes to clarify his goals. Why does he need to influence Rachael? Simply, Peter needs the support of Rachael in order to take on larger projects, which in turn will help him progress in his career.

### 3. Diagnose the World of the Other Person

Peter considers the environment that Rachael works in, daily.

Peter knows the IT department is managed under tight timelines. Rachael is under tremendous pressure to make sure that her projects succeed; the ripple impact of a single failed project could lead to untold damage to the market brand of the organisation.

### 4. Identify Relevant "Currencies"; Theirs and Yours

Peter believes that Rachael's currency is position-related. What Rachael really requires is a person who could in some objective manner assure her that an assigned piece of work was going to be positively completed as required, and that there were going to be no last minute unforeseen issues to resolve.

Peter felt that if Rachael was provided with an objectively framed assurance that was subsequently delivered upon, she'd probably be willing to help Peter with his own career.

### 5. Deal with Relationships

Peter is already on good terms with Rachael. They often exchange pleasantries and Peter would consider Rachael a pleasant colleague.

### 6. Influence Through Give and Take

Peter decides on his exchange. He will offer to advise Rachael of his approach towards the smaller projects assigned to him (including how he intends to address any risks or issues) over a weekly 15 minute catch up with her. In return, he'll ask for an opportunity to work on a larger project once Rachael felt confident in his ability.

When Peter speaks to Rachael, she looks a bit surprised at the offer. However she thankfully accepts the offer right away. Peter shows his gratitude by scheduling the weekly catch ups immediately and by diligently planning for his weekly catch ups. Peter documents any feedback received from Rachael and demonstrates through actions that he has acted upon them. After a few months Rachael shows her appreciation by taking Peter out for a cup of coffee and talking him through his first larger project.

## Apply This Model to Your Everyday Life

It is inevitable that there will be many times when you need someone to do something for you, without using any authority. This is equally true in both professional and private settings. Consider using the Influence Model right now.

- Start preparing. Be tuned to your colleagues and other stakeholders in your organization. Steps 3 and 4 will help you do this.
- Concentrate on building good relationships with others in your organization.
- Help others whenever you can. It feels good to help your colleagues. You will also find that your colleagues will reciprocate the favour.

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