

Power to Influence

Our capacity to influence changes with different situations - research has shown a number of underlying sources. All of these sources of power can be used to successfully influence the outcome of a situation; however, the key is choosing the most appropriate one. Effective influencing is the judicious application of our power. Unfortunately many people see exerting power as a negative thing because they have observed the manipulative application of it rather than it being used positively.

Position Power

There are many situations in which the underlying capacity we have to influence comes from the position that we hold. This is sometimes referred to as legitimate power and comes when someone is given a role by their organisation or society that has some kind of authority attached to it.

Hazard Power

This capacity to influence involves outlining risks or consequences to someone in order to persuade them to behave in a different way. Examples of this could be explaining to someone the legal implications of a certain action or letting a colleague know that something contravenes company policy. In a few situations it may be the only power that will influence someone, particularly if the action that you want them to take has no perceived benefit to them personally. People often feel that hazard power is quite a negative source of power however this is not necessarily the case. It is often very effective because the individual you are trying to influence is not aware of the risk or consequence of their behaviour and as soon as it is pointed out they willingly move or change their mind.

Expert Power

Sometimes an individual will be able to influence us because we perceive that they have an expertise in a particular area. This expert power may come from their qualifications, skill or experience. A classic example of this occurs when we consult a doctor - we are likely to do what they suggest because we believe they have the knowledge to give us the right advice

Connection Power

This source of influence is the power that comes from being connected to someone who can exert influence. This is used quite a lot in organisations where the hierarchy is quite flat - so telling someone that you need information from them for a report you are putting together for the Chief Executive is using the power of connection. In many cases it is an important and legitimate source providing it is true!

Association Power

We are influenced by those who we associate with certain qualities that attract us.

This is the foundation of using celebrities to advertise certain products. If we associate someone with success, expertise, prestige etc and these are qualities we respect or are attracted to then we will be influenced by them.

Reward Power

This is when influence is exerted through the provision of a tangible reward - this can be financial or more intrinsic reward such as praise, recognition or visibility. We are influenced by those who can either directly or indirectly provide us with rewards we seek.

Personal/Relationship Power

We are influenced by certain people simply because we like them or care about them. This is the power of simply being you and the way that you build relationships. The way in which we behave and use our interpersonal skills is the foundation of this source of influence. It is our own interactions with people and the relationship we have built with them that creates our power to influence them.

Information Power

The phrase “knowledge is power” is well known, however it also has connotations of manipulation i.e. the hoarding or over protecting knowledge in order to gain power. Our definition here is different and rests on the fact that the right information to support a case is a very definite source of influence.

The emphasis must be on gaining the right information and using it appropriately. A good example is “we are losing 300 days a year through sickness” as a supporting piece of information for influencing a case around better support for health and well being of staff.

Go back to your influencing objective and ask yourself these three questions:

1. Which powers do I have available to me in this situation?
2. Which one is the most appropriate to use with this group or individual?
3. If I currently do not have any power with this group or individual which source could I develop?