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Influencing Others

COMPETENCY

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Definition: The ability to gain others' support for ideas, proposals, projects, and solutions

- a) Presents arguments that address others' most important concerns and issues and looks for win-win solutions
- b) Involves others in a process or decision, to ensure their support
- c) Offers trade-offs or exchanges, to gain commitment
- d) Identifies and proposes solutions that benefit all parties involved in a situation
- e) Enlists experts or third parties to influence others
- f) Develops other indirect strategies to influence others
- g) Knows when to escalate critical issues to own or others' management, if own efforts to enlist support have not succeeded
- h) Structures situations (e.g., the setting, persons present, sequence of events) to create a desired impact and to maximize the chances of a favorable outcome
- i) Works to make a particular impression on others
- j) Identifies and targets influence efforts at the real decision makers and those who can influence them
- k) Seeks out and builds relationships with others who can provide information, intelligence, career support, potential business, and other forms of help
- l) Takes a personal interest in others (e.g., by asking about their concerns, interests, family, friends, hobbies), to develop relationships
- m) Accurately anticipates the implications of events or decisions for various stakeholders in the organization and plans strategy accordingly

IMPORTANCE OF THIS COMPETENCY

This competency, which is the ability to get others to do what you would like them to do, is fundamental to many goals and activities at work: selling, enlisting support for ideas, obtaining resources, motivating subordinates, energizing teams, and building support for an organizational vision. The higher your level in an organization, the more important is this competency.

More and more organizations are moving away from hierarchical organizations, in which influence depends heavily on the use of positional power. The increasing use of teams requires Influence Skill, rather than authority, to gain support.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS IN DEVELOPING THIS COMPETENCY

As the behaviors for this competency show, there are a wide variety of ways in which this competency can be demonstrated. Most of these ways involve careful analysis of the needs, interests, concerns, and fears of the persons to be influenced. Based on this analysis, the skillful influencer considers alternative approaches and develops influence strategies. The strategies reflect thinking that is not always shown in observable behavior. Developing Influencing Others requires learning this kind of thinking.

One of the best methods to develop Influencing Others is to work closely with a skilled influencer planning influence strategies. Another method is to learn about influence strategies through courses and books. Using influence strategies effectively requires practice and feedback. Courses which involve role playing and feedback can provide this practice.

This competency builds on several other competencies, especially Interpersonal Effectiveness and Persuasive Communication. Developing these competencies will help develop Influencing Others. In addition, Influencing Others often requires knowing or learning about the politics of an organization: the histories and agendas of different groups and the decision makers and key influences of particular types of decisions.

PRACTICING THIS COMPETENCY

- The next time you need to influence someone, ask that person or others what are his/her most important needs and concerns.
- Try to think of a solution that will address the other person's needs or concerns while meeting your own objectives.
- Consider involving others (by asking for input, checking out possible approaches, or working with them to develop a plan) to gain their support.
- Think about what you can offer the other person or group in exchange for what you would like from this person or group.
- Try to think of solutions that will benefit everyone involved in a situation. The book, *Getting to Yes*, by Roger Fisher and William Ury, provides many useful ideas for doing this.
- If an issue is critical and you have exhausted other approaches, consider escalating the issue to your own manager or the other person's manager. This is a strategy which should be used only when absolutely necessary, since it often provokes negative reactions in the other person.
- Before an important meeting, at which it is important to gain the support of another person or group, consider what you can do to structure the event (e.g., by orchestrating the setting, attendees, sequence of events, refreshments, entertainment) to achieve a desired outcome. The decision makers are and what their concerns are likely to be. Try to talk directly to the real decision makers.
- To build a basis for influence efforts in the future, develop and maintain relationships with others from whom you may need support. Find ways to help them. Try to learn about their interests and concerns.

OBTAINING FEEDBACK

Before implementing an influence strategy, discuss it with others and ask for their feedback and suggestions. After an interaction in which you tried to enlist the support of an individual or group, ask a colleague who was present for feedback and suggestions on your influence efforts.

LEARNING FROM EXPERTS

Look for opportunities to work closely with skilled influencers on tasks requiring the development of influence strategies e.g., planning a presentation or sales call, leading a group to achieve a particular outcome. Observe a skilled influencer using influence skills in situations such as sales calls, speeches, meetings with subordinates, meetings to build relationships. Notice what the person says, how he/she says it, and the verbal and nonverbal reactions of the persons present.

Interview a skilled influencer about times when this person successfully influenced others. Try to get the sequence of what the person did and thought. Recognize that the person you interview may be reluctant to discuss some influence efforts, particularly those used to influence the person's current supervisor.

COACHING SUGGESTIONS FOR MANAGERS

If you are coaching someone who is trying to develop this competency, you can:

- Involve this person in some of your own influence efforts and share your thinking about your goals, plans, and the reasons underlying them.
- Provide assignments requiring the use of influence skills: e.g., developing a presentation to senior management; planning a meeting with another group whose cooperation is needed. Provide suggestions and feedback on the planning and implementation of influence strategies.
- Provide opportunities for this person to work closely with skilled influencers.

SAMPLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

By September 10, I will read *Getting to Yes*, by Fisher and Ury and use what I learn to develop a strategy for gaining the cooperation of the R&D Division.

By November 3, I will hold meetings to build relationships with 5 individuals from other departments, whose support I may need over the coming year.

Before the October 5 sales meeting with Central Information, I will call the two project managers they are inviting to that meeting to learn what they would like to gain from the meeting. I will then plan and deliver a presentation that addresses these needs and interests.

By December 15, I will complete a course on *Influencing Others*.

BOOKS

A Leadership Paradox: Influencing Others By Defining Yourself, by Greg Robinson & Mark Rose. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2004.

Consultative Selling: The Hanan Formula for High Margin Sales at High Levels, by Mack Hanan. New York, NY: AMACOM, 2011.

Essential Managers: Influencing People, by Roy Johnson & John Eaton. New York, NY: DK Publishing, Inc., 2009.

Getting Things Done When You are Not in Charge, by Geoffrey Bellman. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2001.

How to Win Friends and Influence People, by Dale Carnegie. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Ltd., 2009.

Influence Without Authority, by Allen Cohen and David Bradford. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005.

Persuasion: The Art Of Influencing People, by James Borg. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2009.

Power: Why Some People Have It and Others Don't, by Jeffrey Pfeffer. New York: NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 2010.

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, by Stephen Covey. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Ltd., 2005.

You Can Negotiate Anything, by Herb Cohen. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2000.

Your Signature Work: Creating Excellence and Influencing Others at Work, by Dianna Booher. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004.

SELF STUDY COURSES

Delegating for Business Success. American Management Association. Tel. 800 250-5308. www.amanet.org/selfstudy/b14348.htm

Getting Past No: Negotiating with Difficult People, by William Ury. Audio CD. Available at www.amazon.com

Successful Negotiating. American Management Association. Tel. 800 250-5308. www.amanet.org/selfstudy/b1416x.htm

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, by Stephen Covey. Audio CD. Available at www.amazon.com

EXTERNAL COURSES

Influencing Skills. Two days. The Hayes Group International, Inc. Tel. 366 765-6764. <http://www.thehayesgroupintl.com/workshops/influencing-skills/>

Leadership and Teamwork. Three days. The Par Group. Tel. 800 247-7188. http://www.thepargroup.com/programs_leadershipTeamwork.html

Influencing Across the Matrix. Two days. BlessingWhite, Tel. 908-904-1000
http://www.blessingwhite.com/events_description.asp?id=631

Negotiating to Win. Three days. American Management Association. Tel. 877 566-9441. www.amanet.org/seminars/seminar.cfm?basesemno=2513

Positive Power and Influence. One-three days. Situation Management Systems. Tel. 603 897-1200.
www.smsinc.com/performance_management_training_programs/positive_power_and_influence.html

Speak! Present! Influence! Two days. VOICE-PRO, Inc. Tel. 800 261-0104.
www.voiceproinc.com/wspeak.aspx

The Voice of Leadership: How Leaders Inspire, Influence and Achieve Results. Three days. American Management Association. Tel. 877 566-9441. www.amanet.org/seminars/seminar.cfm?basesemno=2130