

The Influence Model

Using Reciprocity to Gain Influence

(Also known as the Cohen-Bradford Influence Model)

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Learn how reciprocity can help you influence others.

Have you ever tried to get something – perhaps advice, support, or a key piece of information – from someone who didn't want to help you?

Sometimes, it can be extremely difficult to get people's help, especially when we have no authority over them. This is where an approach such as the Cohen-Bradford Influence Model can help us identify what other people value. We can then use that information so that everyone gets the outcome they want.

In this article we'll examine the Influence Model in detail, and discuss how you can use it when you need help from other people.

About the Model

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

Cohen and Bradford believe that authority can be problematic. It doesn't always guarantee that you'll get support and commitment from those around you; and it can create fear, and motivate people to act for the wrong reasons. This is why it's so useful to learn how to influence others without using authority.

The Influence Model is based on 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 boss a tip that cuts hours off her workload, you might expect, perhaps subconsciously, that she'll do something nice for you in the future.

Using the Model

The Influence Model is useful whenever:

1. You need help from someone over whom you have no authority.
2. The other person is resisting helping you.
3. You don't have a good relationship with the person from whom you need help.
4. You have one opportunity to ask the person for help.
5. You don't know the other person well.

The model has several steps. These are:

- Assume that everyone can help you.
- Prioritize objectives.
- Understand the other person's situation.
- Identify what matters; to you and to them.
- Analyze relationship.
- Make the "exchange."

Once you're familiar with the model, it's not necessary to think each step through consciously.

Let's look at each step in detail, and think about how to apply the model:

1. Assume That Everyone can Help You

Influencing someone else – especially someone who seems to be "being difficult" – can make you feel upset, nervous, or unsure. However, don't write anyone off: approach this situation by looking at the other person as a potential ally.

2. Prioritize Objectives

In this step you need to identify why you are trying to influence this person. What is it that you need from them? What are your primary and secondary goals?

Here, it's important to keep your personal wants and goals out of the situation. For instance, you may subconsciously want to be seen as "right," or you may want to have the "last word." These personal motivations often get in the way of effective negotiation. Focus on your work goals, and leave personal motivators or drivers aside.


3. Understand the Other Person's Situation

In this step, you need to understand your potential ally's world, and understand how he or she is judged. For instance, what performance metrics do they work by? How are they rewarded?

These factors play an important role in what your ally can give, and what he or she might want from you in return.

To evaluate this, ask yourself the following questions:

1. How is this person "measured" at work?
2. What are his or her primary responsibilities?
3. Does this person experience peer pressure from his or her boss or colleagues?
4. What is the culture of this person's organization?
5. What does this person's boss expect from them?
6. What seems to be important to this person?

You can also use [empathy](#)  to step into the world of your potential ally, and to understand what drives his or her behavior.

This step can be challenging; and it will determine whether or not you can identify what type of factors are important to them, which is the next step.

4. Identify What Matters; to you and to Them

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

If you pay attention, you should be able to hear or see the things that this person values most.

Cohen and Bradford identified five types of factors that are most often valued in organizations.

These are:

- Inspiration.
- Task.
- Position.
- Relationship.
- Personal.

a. Inspiration-Related Factors

These are all related to inspiration, vision and morality/strength. People who value these factors want to find meaning in what they're doing. They may go out of their way to help if they know in their heart that it's the right thing to do, or if it contributes in some way to a valued cause.

You can appeal to these people by explaining the significance of your project or request, and by showing that it's the right thing to do. Appeal to their sense of integrity and virtue.

b. Task-Related Factors

These relate to the task at hand and to getting the job done.

Here, you'll want to exchange resources such as money, personnel or supplies. You could offer to help these people on a current project they're working on. Or you could offer your expertise, or your organization's expertise, in exchange for their help.

Task-related factors are often highly valued in new organizations, where supplies and resources may be scarce, as well as by organizations or teams that are struggling to get the finances, supplies or information that they need.

Keep in mind that an important task-related factor is challenge. Many people, especially those who want to test or expand their skills, value the opportunity to work on challenging tasks or projects.

Tip:

Be careful, here, not to engage in anything that may be seen to be bribery. See our article on [Gifts in the Workplace](#) ⁺ for more on this.

c. Position-Related Factors

People who value this type of factor focus on recognition, reputation and visibility. They want to climb the organizational ladder, and to be recognized for the work they're doing.

Here you'll want to appeal to this sense of recognition by publicly acknowledging their efforts. You could offer them lunch with your CEO, or the opportunity to work with a high-profile team. Or, convince them that the project or task will be recognized by respected people in your industry.

d. Relationship-Related Factors

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

So, make these people feel they're connected to you or your organization on a personal level. Offer them emotional support and understanding. Use active listening, so that they can talk about their problems. And say "thank you" to show gratitude for the good work they're doing for you, or have done for you in the past.

e. Personal-Related Factors

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

You can appeal to this person by showing them sincere gratitude for their help. Allow them the freedom to make their own decisions if they're helping you on a team. Keep things simple for them, so they don't feel hassled helping you.

Note:

A common mistake in identifying the type of factor that is important to people is underestimating its importance to them. Just because you don't need to feel important, be recognized, or feel loved by your team doesn't mean that no one else does. Make sure you keep an open mind when identifying these.

5. Analyze the Relationship

In this step you need to analyze what kind of relationship you have with this person. If you know him or her well and you're on good terms, you can directly ask him or 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 move on to the final step.

To do this, take time to get to know the person you're interacting with. Make sure you use [active listening](#) techniques when you're speaking with him or her. Also, develop your [emotional intelligence](#) skills, which will help you recognize not only your own feelings, but the feelings of those around you.

6. Make the "Exchange"

Once you feel you know what your ally wants or needs, and you've determined what you have to offer, you can make "the exchange" and put your findings into action. (Our article on [win-win negotiation](#) can help you with this.)

Make sure that when you make the offer or exchange, it's done in a way that builds trust. Show respect, empathy and understanding to the other person. Show your gratitude to them for helping you, and keep looking for ways to help others.

Example

Mark works in the accounting department in his organization. He's implementing a new software package that will streamline the collections process, eliminating several unneeded steps. However, he needs help from his colleague, Rob, to solve a problem. Rob has exactly the expertise Mark needs.

The problem is that Rob is extremely busy with his own projects, and has so far been unwilling to help. So, Mark uses the Influence Model, as follows:

1. Assume That Everyone can Help You

Mark already knows that Rob could be an ally; they've always gotten along in the past. The only reason that Rob is unwilling to help is because he's "snowed under" with his own projects, most of which have tight deadlines.

2. Prioritize Objectives

Mark takes a moment to clarify his goals. Why does he need to influence Rob?

This is simple: Rob has the expertise Mark needs to overcome a problem he's stuck with. His goal is to gain Rob's help, perhaps for half a day, to solve the problem.

3. Understand the Other Person's Situation

Mark looks at the professional world that Rob, who works full time in IT, works in daily.

Mark knows the IT department is deadline driven. Rob is often under immense pressure to troubleshoot problems as they come up, but also to deliver major projects that have quick turnaround times. As a result, Rob frequently stays late and comes in early to meet all his demands.

4. Identify What Matters; to you and to Them

Mark believes that task-related factors are important to Rob. What he needs most is another set of hands to help him complete some of his current projects. If he could catch up, he'd probably be willing to help Mark with his own project.

5. Analyze the Relationship

Mark is already on good terms with Rob. They don't talk often since they work in different departments, but they've chatted a few times in the hallway, and Mark would consider Rob a friend.

6. Make the "Exchange"

Mark decides on his exchange. He's going to offer Rob a full day of his own time to help him catch on his projects. In return, he'll ask for half a day of Rob's time to help him with his own project.

When he approaches Rob, Rob looks surprised at the offer. But, he accepts immediately. Mark shows his appreciation by showing up early on his day to help Rob, and working hard the entire day. When the time comes for Rob to help Mark, the same holds true: Rob shows up early, and the two get the problem figured out by lunchtime. Mark then takes Rob out for lunch to show his gratitude.

Key Points

The Influence Model can be an effective tool for helping you influence others. It's especially effective in situations where you have no authority over the other person, or where he or she seems unwilling to help you.

The model has six steps. These are:

1. Assume that everyone can help you.
2. Prioritize objectives.
3. Understand the other person's situation.
4. Identify what matters; to you and to them.
5. Analyze the relationship
6. Make the "exchange."

Once you're familiar with the model, it's not necessary to think through each step consciously.

Apply This to Your Life

Although you might not need to use the Influence Model right now, chances are there will come a time when you need something from someone, without using any authority:

- Start preparing now. Pay attention to your colleagues and other key stakeholders in your organization. You can use Steps 3 and 4 to do this.
- Focus now on [building good relationships](#) ⁺ with others in your organization.
- Help others whenever you can. Helping your colleagues not only feels good; your colleagues will likely be happy to repay the favor later.