

With New Chapters on Gender and Distance

ALLAN R. COHEN | DAVID L. BRADFORD

FOREWORD BY AARON LEVIE, CEO, AND DAN LEVIN, COO, BOX, INC.

INFLUENCE *WITHOUT* AUTHORITY

THIRD EDITION OF THE **MANAGEMENT CLASSIC**

GET WORK DONE IN TODAY'S ORGANIZATIONS

INFLUENCE YOUR BOSS, PEERS, CLIENTS,
AND STAKEHOLDERS EVERYWHERE

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND **CREATE** ALLIES

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THIRD EDITION

ALLAN R. **COHEN** | DAVID L. **BRADFORD**

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Names: Cohen, Allan R., author. | Bradford, David L., author.

Title: Influence without authority / Allan R. Cohen and David L. Bradford.

Description: Third edition. | Hoboken, New Jersey : John Wiley & Sons, Inc.,

[2017] | Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2017020942 (print) | LCCN 2017033175 (ebook) | ISBN

9781119347507 (pdf) | ISBN 9781119347514 (epub) | ISBN 9781119347712

(cloth)

Subjects: LCSH: Organizational effectiveness. | Executive ability. |

Interpersonal relations.

Classification: LCC HD58.9 (ebook) | LCC HD58.9 .C64 2017 (print) | DDC

658.4/09-dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017020942>

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To our wives, Joyce and Eva,
who, as our toughest and most supportive colleagues,
have taught us the essence of mutual influence
in strategic alliances.

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FOREWORD

The concepts seem so obvious, so basic.

Be clear on your own goals and objectives before you start—no Ready, Fire, Aim! Assume that everyone is a potential ally, that each of your colleagues can help you achieve your goals in some way.

Understand their reality, their situation, in some detail. Know how they are paid, how they are “goaled,” and how their interests align with yours.

Keep the deeply held human value of reciprocity—of quid pro quo—firmly in mind, and while doing so, think about what you have that they might want, and vice versa. And it never hurts to build up a bit of credit with someone. You never know when you might need to collect.

Be willing to trade, to give something, in order to get what you need.

Would anyone argue with these simple ideas? Of course not.

And yet, in the workplace with our colleagues, when it matters most for our professional success, so many of us fail to keep these ideas in mind or to use them as the foundation of our actions. We complain that “Kira doesn’t work for me, so how can I get her to deliver what I need?” Or that “Malhar won’t attend the meetings of my cross-functional task force. Please tell him that he has to come.”

We have grown from fewer than fifty to over fifteen hundred Boxers in the past seven years. Many of the largest companies in the world, including GE, P&G, and Coca Cola rely on Box, as do tens of thousands of smaller businesses. We have seen the problems that we face grow exponentially in complexity, and watched our colleagues struggle when we demand crisp and effective cross-functional execution in the face of, and despite, that complexity.

In order to grow rapidly, we have always known that we must invest heavily in “skilling up” our leaders to thrive in an increasingly complex world of more partners, more customers, more departments, and more products. And at the center of everything that we teach is one simple

concept—we expect you to get stuff done at breakneck speed whether the people that you depend on report to you or not.

The ideas in this book around the concept of influence without explicit authority lie at the heart of our success as a business, and at the heart of the design of our service—which enables coworkers to easily collaborate around documents and other forms of content so that they can work together without hierarchy or information bottlenecks.

Influence is the foundation of success in the modern world of business and this book is a straightforward guide. We rely on it, we teach it, and you should, too.

—Aaron Levie, CEO, Box Inc.
Dan Levin, COO, Box Inc.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS TO THE FIRST EDITION

Many people have influenced us in positive ways, and we are deeply indebted to them. A number of colleagues read portions of the manuscript in draft form and made helpful suggestions, including J.B. Kassarian, Lynne Rosansky, Les Livingstone, Jan Jaferian, Farshad Rafii, and Roy Lewicki. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Barry Stein, Richard Pascale, Jerry Porras, and Jean Kirsch provided useful stimulation over many years. NTL gave us the opportunity to develop and test our ideas in a series of workshops for managers. Many wonderful friends and clients provided the rich examples we have used, but regrettably, most must remain anonymous to preserve confidentiality. We thank former students Tom Greenfield, Marianne McLaughlin, Spencer Lovette, and James Wiegel and good friend Leslie Charm for their contributions. Our students and clients have been a continuous source of learning. Editor John Mahaney went far beyond the call of duty in helping to shape this book, and we're almost sorry for all the grief we gave him. We very much appreciate the perspective he brought. Sydney Craft Rozen and Louann Werksma buffed our prose, and Nancy Marcus Land's cheerful wisdom made the production process more than bearable. Tom Hart gave us valuable advice on contract issues. Thanks to Sydney Cohen for preparing the index.

We are grateful to Babson's Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Gordon Prichett, the faculty nominating committee, and Ex-President Bill Dill for choosing Allan to be the first occupant of the Walter H. Carpenter Chair. Although the miracles of word processors let us do most of the typing ourselves, several people at Babson were incredibly helpful in producing draft after draft of the manuscript; for their support we thank Margie Kurtzman, Jim Murphy, Sheila Faherty, as well as George Recck and his angels of computer mercy, Ara Heghinian, Scott Andersen, and especially John Walker, who promptly and patiently rescued lost files and answered countless questions. The Graduate School of Business at Stanford also provided valuable support.

Our extended families have also played an important part in helping us, not only by their encouragement but also by the lessons on influence they teach as we interact with them. For their contributions to our ongoing education, we are forever grateful to our wives, children, parents, brothers, in-laws, aunts, uncles, and cousins—a veritable army of informal instructors.

ADDITIONAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS FOR THE SECOND EDITION

We are grateful to an additional group of colleagues and managers who have provided us with feedback and examples. Andrea Corney, Anne Donnellon, PJ Guinan, David Hennessey, James Hunt, Martha Lanning, Carole Robin, Phyllis Schlesinger, Mike Smith, Neal Thornberry, and Yelena Shayenzon have built our ideas and helped with the manuscript. Eric Arcese, Timlynn Babitsky, Suzanne Currey, Brian Duerk, David Garabedian, Mary Garrett, Doug Giuliana, Mike Glass, Tony Greco, Fran Grigsby, Jan Jefarian, Sandi Medeiros, Akihiro Nakamura, Efren Olivares, Dan Perlman, Ethan Platt, Carole Robin, Jim Salmons, Nettie Seabrooks, Scott Timmins, and Paul Westbrook all contributed examples in one form or another. We are also deeply appreciative to the hundreds of managers with whom we have worked, who provide criticism, hard-nosed assessment of the utility of our ideas, and wonderful examples of how they struggle with or use influence at work.

The vagaries of publishing have brought us several Wiley editors since the first edition, all of whom we enjoyed, but we worked most closely with Paula Sinnott, Richard Narramore, and Emily Conway. We thank them for forcing us to make the manuscript ever more accessible and useful.

Alas, despite our profound gratitude to a lengthy list of helpful influencers, we cannot escape final accountability for the results of their splendid efforts. Only we had the authority to complete this book, and we are responsible for its contents.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS FOR THE THIRD EDITION

We are deeply grateful to Nan Langowitz, who suggested the idea for a chapter on gender and influence and added so much to our understanding and perspective that we asked her to coauthor it. Aaron Levie and Dan Levin graciously agreed to write a foreword to this edition, no small feat while running a company that is exploding in size. Additionally, we add only names of those who made new or increased contributions to our examples or learning. To all of them, heartfelt thanks! Matt Abrahams, Shelly Anderson, Kavita Bhat, Alan Briskin, Nancy Brown-Jamison, Crystal Bryant, Jocelyn

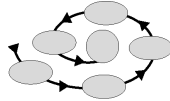
Cascio, Susan Harris, Vishwas Hegde, James Hunt, Gloria Lee, Zhengwei Luo, Shirley Marom, Kate McKone-Sweet, Larkin Mehta, Barbara Merz, Grant Miller, Gopi Parampalli, Carole Robin, Beth Schirick, Lisa Stefanac, Bobbi Thomason, Eiko Tsukamoto, Bonnie Wentworth, Paul Westbrook, Roz Winegrad, and Judi Wise. In addition, our students and clients constantly enrich our understanding. As always, we accept responsibility for the final product.

PART I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

WHY INFLUENCE: WHAT YOU WILL GET FROM THIS BOOK



Influence is one of the hottest topics with all of my clients—how can I have more, how can I develop more in my team, how can I be more effective with influence efforts? So much work today is cross team, cross function, project oriented where the leader and the person accountable rarely has formal authority. If you do, and you use your formal authority, it doesn't tend to go well.

—Wanda Wallace, President and CEO, Leadership Forum;
VoiceAmerica Talk Radio, Host of “Out of the Comfort Zone”

This book is about influence—the power to get your work done. You need to influence those in other departments and divisions: people you can't order and control. You need to influence your manager and others above you, and you certainly can't order and control them!

But you are not alone: nobody has the formal authority to achieve what is necessary, not even with those who report to them. It is an illusion that once upon a time managers could make their direct reports do whatever was needed. Nobody has ever had enough authority—they never have and never will. Organizational life is too complicated for that.

Yet, you can have enough influence to make things happen—and this book will tell you how.

You will learn how to move others to accomplish important objectives, in a way that benefits them as well as you and the organization. We build on a way of working that you already know, though it is easy to lose sight of how to create win-win trades in difficult situations or when dealing with difficult individuals, groups, or organizations. The book teaches you how to stop

doing the things that get in the way of influencing those problematic situations and can dramatically increase your ability to get things done.

When we first wrote about influence in the 1980s, we had to justify its importance to people at all levels of the organization. At that time, the leadership and managerial focus was on how to command better, how to give clear directions and how to ensure compliance. But the world was changing, with a greater need for managing laterally and upward—along with less ability to just give orders downward. Today, almost everyone knows that influence is how the world works. We have lost count of the people who hear the title of this book, *Influence without Authority*, and instantly say, “That’s my life” (Table 1.1).

Few people can do anything significant alone. This requires influence in three directions.

Along with death and taxes, bosses are faced with this inevitable certainty of organizational life. In a flat organization, the boss may be a distant, benevolent resource, while in a more hierarchical one the boss may be breathing down your neck, but no one escapes having someone officially responsible for him or her. Even CEOs have a board and sources of financing they must influence, not to mention the financial markets, the press, and other organizations needed to create or sell company products.

Similarly, virtually everyone in organizations must deal with peers. Very few jobs let a person work completely solo. Most are dependent upon, and important to, a variety of colleagues.

Table 1.1 Forces Increasing the Need for Influence Skills

Increasingly rapid technological change and shortened product cycles; more competition (including internationally)

Complex problems requiring smarter employees, more input from specialists, and more integration, making it difficult to command excellence

Increased workforce diversity creating more differences about what is important and less automatic agreement

Greater geographic dispersal, including language and distance impediments

More information needed from a greater number of people

Less organizational slack from downsizing and cost-cutting, so more use of all employees needed

Greater emphasis on quality and service, so “getting by” doesn’t get by

Fewer traditional hierarchies, more lateral organizations, including product-based, geographical, customer-focused, matrix, virtual, and networked organizations

Finally, some people also have responsibility as supervisors of others—the bosses to all those subordinates just mentioned. These managers are expected to utilize fully their subordinates' talents to see that the assigned work gets done.

Therefore, those keeping their heads down and working only within their immediate areas will slowly become extinct. Whatever your job, you are expected to join your colleagues in important work, which will lead you to influence and be influenced. You will need to know how to sell important projects, persuade colleagues to provide needed resources, create satisfactory working relationships with them and their managers, insist that your boss respond to issues that may not appear important to him or her, and (in turn) give thoughtful responses to requests associates make of you. The person asking something of you today may be the very one you'll need next week.

Here is an actual example (only some names disguised) of life in today's organizations.

Manucom, Inc., a successful manufacturing firm, recognized important market shifts in their industry. In 2014, the company expanded to a slightly different market space and invested heavily in building a software product. The company wanted to rapidly transition into a technology company structured into separate technology and product teams. Most of the product team, which was responsible for sales and marketing, had backgrounds with little technological understanding. (They cared about and were rewarded for creating a successful new product and generating demand so that it could be sold at profitable prices and volumes. The technology team was most interested in creating a new and interesting technology with the latest bells and whistles, regardless of whether customers wanted them or would pay for them. Their rewards came from technical complexity and novelty, solving difficult problems independent of demand.) The technical and product teams were supposed to be linked by the platform management team, whose members had technology backgrounds and MBAs. This team owned the entire software platform (and were rewarded for seeing that individual products worked as part of an integrated platform, which would reduce overall costs and reduce complexity).

The new product was supposed to go live in December 2015. The marketing campaign had started, the sales team was ready to sell (and cared about the new products to help meet sales targets and achieve their bonus goals), but the tech team was way behind schedule. Despite this, the product team decided to showcase the incomplete solution to the entire sales force, thinking the demo would buy some time. However, the product crashed during the national sales demo!

Millions of dollars had been spent, and emotions were running high. The product team blamed marketing, sales, and technology. The technology team blamed product and marketing. Even though everyone was from the same company, people treated each other as contractors, often blaming each other for breach of contract and trust.

SACHIN BHAT IS ASKED TO STEP IN

A few months later, Sachin Bhat, an engineer in another division and a new MBA who had recently joined the platform team, was asked to lead the project, which included getting the finger-pointing product and technology teams to work together.

What would you do?

Before reading further, consider how you would go about tackling this messy, highly charged situation. How would you identify the core problems, gain the trust needed to get people back to work, and salvage the new product if possible or kill it if necessary?

Here is Bhat's account of how he used influence to address the many challenges of gaining collaboration:

Until then our platform team was not involved with the execution of this project due to other obligations. My first two weeks into the project was to understand the reason for failure from different perspectives—I interviewed product folks, engineers, project managers, marketing managers, program managers, and engineering managers. Because I wanted to understand the product and people, I was carefully observing the dynamics between people and quickly wanted to understand the “currencies” that I could trade with all of them.

I spent two weeks talking to every single person, lowest to highest. All were good at pinpointing everyone else's issue. I wanted to understand power, who could influence the power holder, and be sure not to step on landmines. They had spent \$140M; they all thought I would identify one person to blame it all on. I said “No, we all missed it.”

I caught the problem. At the end I presented to my SVP [senior vice president] and said it was not tech capability, but that the process had been badly managed. The product team only knew products, didn't know how to run software development, and it was the same with the tech team. (Unlike with manufactured products, a product team has to “thin slice” a software project, not give the tech team the whole thing all at once, or they won't know how to tackle it and the problems until the last minute. By receiving the project in orderly, small, thin slices, the tech team can make steady progress and not be overwhelmed.)

It was all blame games; every team blamed the other teams. They did not know how to prioritize. If I took a side, it would be a problem, because it would be stepping on toes.

Both technology and product senior management had worked together elsewhere, so in the big meeting I couldn't publicly say who was right or wrong, because it was highly political. But I told my manager and he told the SVP offline.

In the big meeting people were saying I would clean up the mess; I didn't like that; [I] knew I had to get everyone on my side. I had to be subtle, saying *we* would fix the problems.

The VP [vice president] was happy because I was not stepping on his shoes. I gave him my observations and asked him to give the reports in all big meetings, and let him run the show. It wouldn't fly for me to say, "I would do it."

The product team in Los Angeles blames the tech team in Seattle all the time—I went back and forth. I kept saying, "Blame is not a help; we all win if this works or lose if it doesn't. Think of it as delivering a product together; not one side wins, and the other one loses if it fails."

Every time I visited the tech team I talked to every engineer; I asked about their families, took them to dinners. I wanted not to sound artificial, so they wouldn't feel threatened, or that I was out to get their jobs. After two [to] three months it worked. Now when I go they reach out to bring us issues, and there's no more talk about superior or inferior groups. They would tell me their concerns, which helped me understand worries within engineering. Since I have an engineering background, I often knew when they were approaching problems incorrectly.

I wanted to understand the root issues. Then I would talk to the engineering manager and help him solve the problems. If you talk only to the managers, they just say that all is fine.

I knew November–December would be a big milestone. The first three or four releases should be on time, even if we just do one thing, without bells and whistles. Weekly I gave quick updates to my VP and SVP; all four product releases I promised were on time. They were happy because that had never been done before. I wanted the perception that the process was working. We had a biweekly meeting just to tell what we were doing and going to do. Previously, the process was not transparent, which did not work.

The previous day before the demo, we met sales district managers and they were totally skeptical about this product. We accepted their skepticism as understandable because of the history. After we conducted a successful hands-on demonstration meeting with 500 sales folks, they said, "You have transformed the product; we will sell it." And they even gave me a huge shout-out.

Also when the SVP was in town, I asked for a short meeting about how I was doing and watched the reactive body language. I am ambitious, so that

way in the reporting process I could show my unique contributions without going behind my manager's back to brag. It was a byproduct of "just reporting on progress."

At the beginning, the marketing officer was completely negative because of the previous fiasco, but it worked in my favor: when I kept quiet, people asked me in front of my director why I didn't respond. I said, "I do not want to fight; my goal is to just deliver, that's my answer. Wait for two months then see what progress we have made." After the two months, every time I see her, she says, "Oh, Sachin Bhat has done a great job."

This example, without all the detail of how Sachin did it, foreshadows many of the book's themes. Several individuals and groups are pursuing their own agendas. No one person or group has the correct answer and cannot be ordered to help. Collaboration is needed. Groups working at a distance can easily stereotype one another. Mistrust blocks open and honest communication, causing poor and costly decisions. Instead, careful listening and responsiveness are needed to regain sufficient openness to really understand the issues. The various parties must feel that they are gaining something they care about to get them to cooperate. Early successes lead to greater cooperation. Individual recognition has to come from accomplishment, not obvious self-promotion.

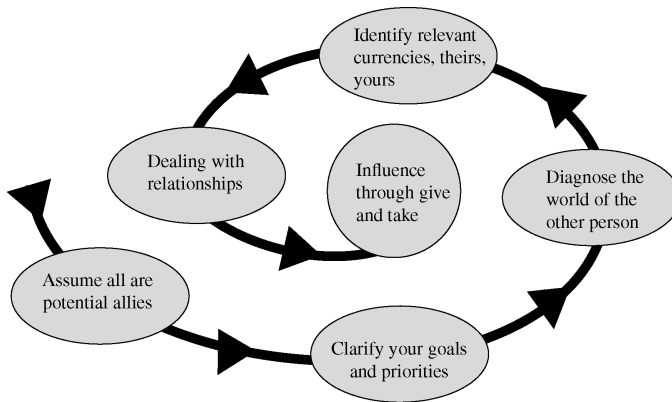
With so much interdependence required, wielding influence becomes a test of skill. Going hat in hand to throw yourself at a colleague's mercy may work once or twice, but is seldom a powerful or effective option. At the other extreme, trying to bull your way through by sheer nerve and aggressiveness can be costly as well. Antagonizing crucial peers or superiors is a dangerous strategy that can easily come back to haunt you. So, what is the alternative?

When you want to influence those you don't control, you will have to get to know them, figure out what they want, build reasonable trust so they will consider making exchanges, satisfy them, and slowly build cooperation. If you already have close relationships, mutual influence is a free-flowing byproduct that seems to happen naturally.

WHY AN INFLUENCE MODEL?

Aren't these points self-evident? And don't you use them already? "Yes" to both of those; when you already know how to influence individuals or groups to get needed cooperation, just do it. But if you are stuck or frustrated, can't figure out what is really wanted or don't care to give it, are having trouble connecting, don't seem to have anything to offer, or want

Figure 1.1
Summary of the Cohen-Bradford Model of Influence without Authority



to be certain how best to approach someone, then a systematic model can be incredibly helpful in making sure you have covered all the steps or make things worse before you get going.¹

The model we developed is based on a universal principle of interaction social scientists call the Law of Reciprocity. It states that people expect to get “paid back for what they do for others.” When someone helps you, you are expected sooner or later to somehow reciprocate, in some reasonably equivalent way. This give and take—formally called exchange—is a core part of all human interaction and the lubricant that makes organizations functional.

Although the concept of give and take is in many ways simple and straightforward, the process of exchange is more complicated. We have found that there are six essential components (Figure 1.1).

Brief Summary of the Steps of the Model

Assume everyone is a potential ally. With this mindset, no matter how difficult the interaction might be, it is possible that the other may eventually help. With enough exploration, it is likely that almost everyone cares about something that you could offer in return for what you seek.

Clarify your goals and priorities. Be sure you know what you want, what is most important, and what you would settle for. Be specific; “good working relationship” is too general to be useful.

Diagnose the world of the other person. In organizational life, people care about many things including how they are measured and rewarded, what their boss expects, their unit's culture, the actual tasks they are assigned, and so on. Knowing what they care about helps in (tentatively) figuring out what you might offer.

Identify relevant currencies, theirs, yours. Since exchange is involved, currencies provide a useful metaphor for what someone values. Most people value many different currencies, and fortunately, most people wanting influence often have more currencies than they might think.

Dealing with relationships. This has two aspects: (a) how good (or strained) is the present relationship and (b) how does the other person want to be related to?

Influence through give and take. In this process you give something the other party values (a currency) in exchange for what you want. This can be done implicitly or explicitly, casually or formally, depending on the relationship, the organization's culture, and both parties' personal preferences.

Chapter 2 (and the rest of the book) explores all these steps in more detail. But much of the time influence happens when people use elements of this model instinctively and automatically. When you already have a good relationship and have been mutually influencing one another for some time, you don't need conscious diagnosis, reflection on your key goals, or an assessment of the relationship. It comes naturally. Like the person in Moliere's play who discovered that after all these years he was unknowingly speaking "prose," you probably already are doing much of what we describe here without thinking about it, especially when things are going well.

But other conditions make influence more difficult. These are listed in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Conditions Requiring Conscious Use of an Influence Model

Use an influence model when faced with one or more of the following conditions:

The other person is known to be resistant.

You don't know the other person or group and are asking for something that might be costly.

You have a poor relationship (or your group has a poor relationship with the other person's group).

You might not get another chance.

You have tried everything you can think of but the other person still refuses.

Table 1.3 Barriers to Influence

<i>External</i>	<i>Internal</i>
Power differential too big	Lack of knowledge about how to influence
Different goals, objectives, priorities	Blinding attitudes
Incompatible measures and rewards	Fear of reactions
Rivalry, competitiveness, jealousy	Fear of failing

Conscious attention to this model isn't necessary at all times, but when useful, consider the model analogous to a pilot's checklist, which is followed routinely before a flight. Pilots know what to do, but the checklist ensures they cover all the bases. Such an influence checklist is especially helpful when you face an anxiety-provoking situation that may narrow your focus and constrain the alternatives considered.

Under those conditions where one meets resistance and little cooperation, the reverse of this model can play out. Rather than seeing the others as potential allies, it is hard not to slip into seeing them as recalcitrant fools—or worse. Rather than fully understanding their world, the common tendency is to simplify and stereotype it. The stress of the situation can lead you to forget your primary goals and just want to do the other in. Most people don't intend to do that, but that is why a model helps. It allows you to step back and make sure that conditions let you achieve influential win-win outcomes. But what are the barriers to doing that?

BARRIERS TO INFLUENCE

We need to start by acknowledging that in some conditions influence is not possible (Table 1.3). There truly are impossible people (though far fewer than most people think). And some external conditions may block a working relationship. However, we have found that in most cases influence fails because of internal barriers within the influencer. Those are ones you have the most control over.

External Barriers

Too great a power differential between you and the person or group you want to influence. There may be such a hierarchical distance that it is impossible

to make contact or the difference is so great that you have little to offer. But we often overestimate the inaccessibility of those even a couple of levels above us.

The people you want to influence have such different personal and organizational goals and objectives that you can't find common ground. This can be true or it can just reflect not searching deep enough.

The people you want to influence have incompatible performance measures. These may not let them respond to what you want. The measurement system may give them little latitude.

The people you want to influence are rivals, or feel competitive and don't want you to succeed. Or there might be too great a negative history between you (or your units) that cooperation is impossible. But organizations that fiercely compete with each other (like IBM and Microsoft) can find common ground in a specific product (like developing the chip for the Xbox).

These can be objective reasons why the other cannot be influenced, but be sure before you jump to that conclusion. You will see many examples of people who reached across several boundaries, who discovered things the other would want, who uncovered a common goal underneath the differences and who, with great effort, could build working relationships with previous adversaries

Internal Barriers

Occasionally, you can't overcome these external barriers, no matter how skilled an influencer you are. However, we have discovered that far more often, the barriers are *inside* the influencer.

These internal barriers include:

Lack of knowledge of how to go about influencing when there are objective difficulties. As instinctive as some kinds of influence are, many people do not have a very conscious idea of how to go about it when the other person or group is not responsive. They don't think of influence as a kind of exchange, and don't understand how important it is to deliver something the other person values, rather than what they themselves value. They emphasize how wonderful what they want is, and forget that it must appeal to something the other person or group cares about.

Attitudes that blind you to important objective information that would help you.

Do you think that you shouldn't have to try to influence others; they should just recognize truth (or a better mousetrap) and give in? Another

dysfunctional attitude is rapidly writing off anyone who doesn't quickly go along with a request, assuming that they are deficient in some important way. We will say a lot about this all-too-common barrier and how to overcome it. And another handicap is knowing what would move the other person but you can't stand people who want that, so you back off or become hostile.

Fear of the other person or group and how they might react. Frequently, people recognize that to gain influence they need to say something that might get the other person or group angry or wanting to retaliate. Out of fear, usually untested (and often unfounded), they decide they can't go ahead. Even the idea that pushing might make the other person not like you can paralyze some people.

Fear of failing. Most significant initiatives involve risk of failure/rejection, but some may be so concerned about embarrassment or shame that no attempt at influence is better than a refusal—or being accepted and then having the project or activity fail.

OVERCOME THE BARRIERS: USE AN INFLUENCE MODEL TO GUIDE YOU

Can you get past these barriers (and others we will introduce in later chapters)? We will help you step back and use some new guidelines. The challenge will be to overcome your own feelings and reactions, so that you can better diagnose just what is required and learn to get past the fears and misconceptions that block you. The next chapter develops the Cohen-Bradford Influence without Authority model and builds your learning from there.

PLAN, BUT DO NOT COME ACROSS AS SELF-SEEKING

This may sound calculating—and it is. But it is deliberate planning about how to get work done, not calculation for your personal benefit. If people perceive you as interested only in your own advancement or success, they will be wary, resistant, or go underground to retaliate later. In this way, influence in organizations over time goes to the sincere, those genuinely interested in the welfare of others, those who make lots of connections and often engage in mutually profitable exchanges. Machiavellian, self-seeking behavior may work for a while but eventually creates enemies or lack of interest in being helpful, which renders you ineffective. Someone who wants to get you can trade negative actions for your behavior, and this payback can

be unpleasant. If your organization has a negative culture where only self-seeking gets rewarded, it eventually suffers and declines. People who care about the organization's objectives get disenchanting and leave as soon as they can, and those who stay spread bitterness.

GET “TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE”

The discussion so far has focused on achieving your task objectives by setting up a win-win outcome. That is primary, but it often produces an important secondary benefit: a more positive work relationship. The influence process of working to understand the world of the other, of speaking to their needs, of paying attention how to work together, and in having the other satisfied with the outcome usually has a positive effect on the relationship.

Research suggests that “having good work relationships” is a key factor valued at work. (Have you ever been in a negative work climate? It can be poisonous.) Often people are hesitant to push for new ideas for fear of alienating others—and sometimes that is the unfortunate outcome. But we are suggesting that using the Cohen-Bradford Influence model offers the possibility of simultaneously achieving task success and incrementally building the positive work relationships most people prefer.

THE BOOK'S ORGANIZATION

Here's how we do it. This chapter has introduced the need for influence and the benefits of learning a more systematic way of thinking about how to get it. Chapter 2 spells out the core influence model, and Chapters 3 through 7 provide more detail about each stage of the model. Then in a series of Practical Application chapters, we use the influence model in familiar situations to demonstrate how to get what you need to do good work. We include two new chapters on gender and influence and distance and influence. You may want to read selectively among these application chapters to fit your current situation, and then return later as you move into other, more complex settings.

In addition, we offer on our website several cases and numerous extended examples of people who had to go through many obstacles to acquire influence (<http://www.influencewithoutauthority.com>). (For more detail about these examples and the lessons we draw from them, see Appendix A on pages 279–284.)

This book can help you get ahead by showing you how to make good things happen for the organization and for those you deal with. More power to you.