

## Strategic Influencing: Changing Times !

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The vast majority of influencing skills programmes focus almost exclusively on handling *face-to-face interaction* more effectively. They help individuals and managers be more assertive, to 'engage' and 'channel' people within conversations, to develop more 'style versatility'. Not many people will argue against these being important skills, and we certainly won't!

**However, times have changed!**

What these approaches to influencing *don't* deal with,

are the critical questions that arise when you try to influence the agenda within large and complex organizations.

Globalisation, virtual teams, matrix management structures. Mergers, acquisitions, partnerships. All these factors add relational and task complexity to the 'day job'. Fundamentally, markets are more complex and simple, one-dimensional corporate objectives are a thing of the past. Today, managers live in times where ambiguity, change and scarce resources are the norm.

**In these conditions politics thrive**

Today's managers are faced with trying to influence sometimes *hundreds* of people, each of whom has a stake in their proposal. These individuals may be just down the corridor, or they may be half way round the world. They may have aligned views, but more often than not, they will have quite different agendas and perspectives.

Now the critical questions are not so much 'How do I influence an individual *within* a conversation?' but '*Which conversations* do I need to have, *when*, and *to what end*?'

In this context, getting new ideas onto the agenda, or trying to influence the organisation's direction, demands what we would describe as 'organizational savvy and wit!'. It demands:

1. that excellent ideas be pursued without reliance on the hierarchical chain-of-command
2. a 'helicopter view' of the political landscape
3. intelligent navigation through this landscape, anticipating issues and working through them
4. networks that can offer help on where issues may lie and how to work with them
5. creativity and collaboration across organisational boundaries.

For want of a better way to describe it, we call this 'strategic influencing'!

## **Strategic influencing, or more simply, organisational savvy and wit!**

There is no question that interpersonal influencing skills have been hugely helpful to several generations of managers. And, in organisations that were traditionally structured, with clear reporting lines, aligned on the same value proposition for years, etc., these were a huge part of the influencing equation.

However, in our experience, it is now ‘strategic’ influencing skills that differentiate managers who make an impact, from those who don’t.

It is managers with strategic influencing skills that take the organization forward, that drive the breakthroughs. And, as we all know, merely maintaining current competence will *not* ensure a future for many organisations in today’s global economy.

Look around you at the excellent managers – how would you rate them as strategic influencers?

## **Strategic influencers – creating tomorrow’s organisations**

Delivering new ideas, products and services has never been more critical. Yet most of the stumbling blocks and barriers to successful

innovations, are to be found right here within our organisations, before they even get out into the marketplace. [In fact many of us have worked in organisations where it was a miracle anything ever got out the door!]

So, how does a manager go about developing the organisational savvy required to work around, over or through these organisational blocks and barriers?

Well, some people seem to just have it. They naturally develop and nurture connections that they can call on when needed. They seem to have a natural sense of timing. Intuitively they know when to push, and when to hold back. They seem to know how to work with conflicting agendas and build alignment surely and steadily.

Some of us, however, aren’t so lucky! The whole idea of managing organisational politics feels uncomfortable at best, or positively distasteful at worst.

Others struggle to gather networks of people who make a difference when we’re trying to work through political barriers and blocks.

Basically, many managers simply lack the tools and skills to develop and maintain a ‘helicopter view’ of the landscape. They stumble and

falter over political barriers and blocks they don’t anticipate, or even see at all! We all know most people develop organizational savvy with experience – it’s called the school of hard knocks! Well, this is the normal (painful and slow) way of learning to be a strategic influencer – through repeated failures and frustrations!

## **Yet, all these skills can be learned!**

Managers will not become superb influencers overnight. But, with the right tools, thinking and practice, managers can massively improve their effectiveness. We know, because we’ve seen it happen time and time again.

NetWorks for You™ is the articulation of a toolkit we have used working alongside managers as change consultants over the past two decades.

It is a programme that is totally focused on helping managers to rapidly develop their organisational savvy and wit!

NetWorks for You™ isn’t the answer to everything. But, for organisations that want to step up the innovation, and motivation of managers to shape the future, it will be the best investment they will make in a long time.