

Influencing Well

Influence is a learned skill, it is essential if we are to effectively lead both peers and managers toward the greater outcomes for our organisations. The following ideas are adapted from Human Capital Magazine Issue 5 No 6 article *How Influential are You?*

Australian managers generally do not influence well. Often first attempts at influence begin with technical expertise – we tell them the information or the reason, because we know this to be ‘true’...and we are amazed when they don’t immediately think just like we do! This is the **competing level** – we are competing for recognition, for resources, for support, for ideas, or even just for time for them to listen to us.

Anyone who only relies on technical skills or information will hit frustration quickly. It’s not enough to be right: if the message is not clear because it is not presented in an influential manner, it will not get heard.

If you take a non-negotiable stand rather than discussing and negotiating, you no longer have influence. The real issue has dissolved into who has control over the issue. To move **beyond competing, you must learn to create buy-in**.

Without the tools to influence strategically, a lot of the effort we put into work can be wasted. *High level influencers sit back and ask questions, they facilitate discussion, they clarify the issue and then they put forward their thoughts in a logical manner.*

- Build networks of important stakeholders – first identify all the people both inside and outside the organisation that are important for the success of your team. This may include those you report to, your peers, significant customers, suppliers and community figures.
- Engage with these stakeholders – actively initiate conversation with stakeholders to understand what they do, what challenges they face. This may involve conversations outside your area of expertise or immediate interest. Look for opportunities where you can add value, and collaborate or share resources. Engaging with stakeholders is an ongoing activity not usually achieved in one meeting.
- Collaborate with stakeholders – find out their ideas and views first before making a decision or declaring your position. Carefully framed questions can draw out their ideas, build on similarities, and move all the parties toward a shared position.
- Manage conflict – deal with conflict directly as a normal part of collaboration. Don’t leave the ‘undiscussables’ undiscussed. Good influencers seek out areas of disagreement and discuss these openly in a positive and constructive way.