



Influence techniques

Introduction

The techniques used by supervisors to influence people can be roughly divided into two categories, i.e., profiling and respecting.

There are two profiling (directive, task oriented) techniques:

- prescriptive
- logical

And there are two respecting (supportive, person oriented) techniques:

- motivational
- relational

Depending on the situation and the people involved, a certain technique or combination of techniques can increase or decrease in effectivity. At each stage of the process the best possible combination needs to be sought.

As a supervisor rises in the chain of command, it becomes increasingly important to consciously use various influence techniques. Although it is to be recommended that a supervisor can employ all techniques, in practice we see that there is usually a preference for one or more of the techniques.

Supervisors who know the four techniques, and know in which circumstances which ones are most effective, can greatly increase their effectiveness in dealing with others. Below, we further describe the techniques.



The prescriptive technique

Basic premise:

Your personal standards, values, expectations, wishes and demands.

Attitude and behavior:

Your personal opinions are presented as the standard, and clearly indicate what is expected from the other. You often use the pronoun 'I'. You clearly indicate what is viewed as positive or negative, and clearly show what the consequence is of the other's behavior. These consequences can be physical or financial but chiefly will be psychological. This can include: criticism, approval, rejection, acceptance, support or obstruction. The prescriptive technique is usually short and sweet, either in short conversations or in a few moments of clarity inserted into another discussion (beginning and end).

Precondition:

You know what you want and have something to offer or withhold from the other.

Risks:

Issuing too many negative assessments and applying sanctions can damage a relationship. This technique is often confused with authoritarian actions. The association is a logical one (who holds the power can impose his or her values and standards on others), however, a subordinate can also apply this technique very effectively.

Effectiveness:

This technique is effective in situations where you have a personal interest or where it is important to set clear conditions. The technique is not effective when the other holds a shared interest in your proposals or ideas.



The logical technique

Basic premise:

Logic, reason, facts and the demonstrable.

Attitude and behavior:

Making well-founded proposals. Arguments based on facts, numbers and so forth. Counter arguments are expertly parried. Impersonal terms are used. The 'best' solution is the goal. A conversation held according to the logical technique takes time. When the parties begin to repeat themselves, it is a sign this technique is not being used well. It usually means the prescriptive style would be more effective.

Precondition:

Know what you are talking about.

Risk:

Obfuscating personal interests that are in play, as they will generally be revealed in the end.

Effectiveness:

This technique is effective when the other respects you as an expert in your field or if you have important information on the subject. This technique will have practically no effect if the other is angry or emotional or if your personal interests are in play.



The motivational technique

Basic premise:

A vision of the desired situation or goal in the future, that can be achieved by collaboration.

Attitude and behavior:

Drawing a picture of the future in colorful seductive words. Emphasizing the importance of a communal effort to reach this goal, speaking in terms of 'we' a lot. Spreading enthusiasm, inspiration and faith. Being inspirational to your listeners, mobilizing involvement and energy.

This technique takes relatively little time. Long-lasting motivational stories lose their effect rather quickly.

Precondition:

Having a vision, believing in it and really being passionate about it.

Risk:

Building castles in the sky or releasing hot air balloons again and again, causing your credibility to crumble.

Effectiveness:

This technique can be very effective when others need to be motivated and you command the trust and respect needed to make it work. This style is not effective if the others have negative feelings which they cannot express or if the situation requires concrete decision making.



The relational technique

Basic premise:

The conviction that the ideas, opinions and feelings of the others are valuable and that listening to them will lead to a healthy cooperation.

Attitude and behavior:

To be able to imagine the other's position, show an interest, asking (real) questions and listening. Summarizing from time to time to check if you understand what the other said. Showing understanding for the other's viewpoint, even when you don't agree. Aiming for an atmosphere of openness and trust, also by bringing up own insecurities and shortcomings.

This technique can take a lot of time.

Precondition:

Having a real interest in the world of the other. Being willing to take your time. Not hiding behind your function but communicating human to human. Possibly even addressing the relationship between you and the other.

Risk:

Using this technique as a 'trick'. Not having a genuine interest and being found out later.

Effectiveness:

This technique is effective in situations where the final outcome is not yet determined and in which you are open to suggestions and objections. This technique can be essential when the other party is very emotional. This technique is not effective when the situation requires a rapid decision or if the other wants to know exactly what they have to expect.