1. The Influence Model

Using Reciprocity to Gain Influence (Also known as the Cohen-Bradford Influence Model)

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.

About the Model

The 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.

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 all are potential allies.
• Clarify your goals and priorities.
• Diagnose the world of the other person.
• Identify relevant "currencies"; theirs, and yours.
• Deal with relationships.
• Influence through give and take.

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 all are Potential Allies

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. Clarify Your Goals and Priorities

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 goals for your role, and leave personal motivators or drivers aside.

3. Diagnose the World of the Other Person

In this step, you need to understand your potential ally's world. To evaluate this, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What are his or her primary responsibilities?
2. Does this person experience peer pressure?
3. What do people expect from this person?
4. 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 this person's relevant "currency", which is the next step.

4. Identify Relevant "Currencies"; Theirs and Yours

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 currency that this person values most. Cohen and Bradford identified five types of currency that are most often valued.

These are:

• Inspiration-related currencies.
• Task-related currencies.
• Position-related currencies.
• Relationship-related currencies.
• Personal-related currencies.

a. Inspiration-Related Currencies

These currencies are all related to inspiration, vision, and morality/strength. People who value these currencies 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 request, and by showing that it’s the right thing to do. Appeal to their sense of integrity and virtue.

b. Task-Related Currencies

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

You could offer to help these people on a current project they’re working on. Or you could offer your expertise in exchange for their help.

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

c. Position-Related Currencies

People who value this currency focus on recognition, reputation and visibility. They want to climb the ladder, and to be recognised 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 a VIP, or the opportunity to work with a high-profile project.

d. Relationship-Related Currencies

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 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 Currencies

This is probably the simplest currency of the five. These currencies 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. Keep things simple for them, so they don't feel hassled helping you.

**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 all are potential allies.
2. Clarify your goals and priorities.
3. Diagnose the world of the other person.
4. Identify relevant "currencies"; theirs and yours.
5. Deal with relationships.
6. Influence through give and take.

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 the organisation. You can use Steps 3 and 4 to do this.
- Focus now on building good relationships with others in the organisation.
- Help others whenever you can. Helping your colleagues not only feels good; your colleagues will likely be happy to repay the favor later.