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Influencing up

## Influencing up

Roisin Gwyer

*The University Library, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, UK*

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the literature on influencing upwards in organisations for practical approaches, which can be used in libraries.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The literature is examined to see if there is any agreement on which factors are successful when influencing upwards within organisations. Both management and library literatures are examined and a list of possible influencing behaviours is compiled.

**Findings** – Although there is little specific library literature on this topic there is enough in the management literature to suggest influence strategies and behaviours which librarians might consider using in order to increase influence within organisations. Influence of the core group in particular is looked at as is the correlation between influence and leadership style. As well as identifying specific influence strategies there is some discussion of the underpinning values of librarianship and how these can be used to influence the organisation more widely.

**Originality/value** – This paper provides food for thought for library practitioners on how they might work within organisations to take the library's agenda forward.

**Keywords** Libraries, Library management, Strategic management, Influence

**Paper type** Viewpoint

### Introduction

For much of 2007 I was on a part time secondment to the Marketing Department of the University of Portsmouth in the UK (my full time post is in the University Library). This secondment led me to reflect on issues such as departmental culture, mission criticality and influence within the organisation. At the same time a new extension was being added to the University Library; we had been lobbying unsuccessfully for some years for more space, and this also raised questions of exactly what influenced the decision makers in the organisation to bring the library extension to the top of the list?

In 1968 Robert F. Munn wrote an influential article, "The bottomless pit, or the library as viewed from the administration building", which suggested (to US University librarians) that their libraries were not often in the thoughts of those who set budgets and made the big decisions within their organisations. The reasons for this were because the library is an academic "sleeping dog", i.e. it is not likely to cause a riot or to bring in a million dollar grant. It does not consume a large portion of the overall budget, and the budget is pretty consistent from year to year; however it also is the only department that has no limits to need: research libraries in particular can expand forever (even more so in the modern digital environment when physical space is less of a concern). It is seen as a "Good Thing" by all – as long as someone else is paying – so there is little pressure brought to bear on decision makers. Munn concludes that the cost-benefit of libraries has not been proved, but librarians would be well advised to start considering this. If this seems like a call from a bygone era, Deemer (2007),



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another US University Librarian who was on a secondment outside of his library to a central post, echoes Munn. Whilst away he thought little about the Library as it created no problems; however he is very positive about the experience in that it opened his eyes to ways in which the library could expand its role to help previously ignored user populations.

Whilst these examples are both very specific to a country and sector, they echo those concerns vocalised whenever librarians get together – how to extend the sphere of influence of the library? More recently Roberts and Rowley (2008, p. 210) suggest that “. . . this is of particular importance in today’s organizations where libraries and information professionals are often working – and indeed are expected to work – beyond traditional boundaries and in so doing can provide added value”. Cialdini (2001, p. 72) talks of persuasion (he makes no distinction between persuasion and influence) being an important tool in “a world where cross- functional teams, joint ventures, and intercompany partnerships have blurred the lines of authority”. Or to put it another way “organisations suffer when key people can’t effectively influence up” (Goldsmith, 2008a).

Although it seems to be accepted that influence is an important leadership quality (consider the content of many management development and leadership programmes) there is not a vast literature (Reber and Berger, 2006, p. 235). Much of the literature is about influencing downwards within organisations rather than influencing those senior managers who make the important decisions.

### Definitions

Reber and Berger (2006, p. 237) define influence as “. . . the ability to get things done by affecting the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, decisions, statements, and behaviors of others”, it is about being heard. Rost (1993, cited in Charbonneau, 2004, p. 565) calls it “an interactive process in which people attempt to convince other people to believe and/or act in certain ways”. Much influence within organisations happens in a downwards direction when a manager wants buy in from the workforce to perform in particular ways, for example, in embracing a new way of working. This type of influence has behind it a power relationship. Influencing those at the same level in the organisation is called influencing across and may be a situation in which mutual self interest is demonstrated as there is no direct power relationship. “Influencing up” then means influencing in an upwards direction, i.e. seeking to influence those at a higher level within the organisation, particularly those people at executive or senior management levels who set strategic direction and decide on major spending. As the power relationships in these three areas are different then it may be that different techniques are needed to influence effectively. As new generations move into the workforce there is also some interest in managing across generations and in how new professionals can influence their managers, so some of the strategies identified here may have wider applicability.

### Influence strategies

Yukl (2006, p. 164) identifies 11 “influence tactics” (see Table I) which are defined as “the type of behavior used intentionally to influence the attitudes and behavior of another person”.

Tacit	
Rational persuasion	The agent uses logical arguments and factual evidence to show a proposal or request is feasible and relevant for attaining important task objectives
Apprising	The agent explains how carrying out a request or supporting a proposal will benefit the target personally or help advance the target person's career
Inspirational appeals	The agent makes an appeal to values and ideals or seeks to arouse the target person's emotions to gain commitment for a request or proposal
Consultation	The agent encourages the target to suggest improvements in a proposal or to help plan an activity or change for which the target person's support and assistance are required
Collaboration	The agent offers to provide relevant resources and assistance if the target will carry out a request or approve a proposed change
Ingratiation	The agent uses praise and flattery before or during an influence attempt, or expresses confidence in the target's ability to carry out a difficult request
Personal appeals	The agent asks the target to carry out a request or support a proposal out of friendship, or asks for a personal favor before saying what it is
Exchange	The agent offers an incentive, suggests an exchange of favors, or indicates a willingness to reciprocate at a later time if the target will do what the agent requests
Coalition tactics	The agent seeks the aid of others to persuade the target to do something, or uses the support of others as a reason for the target to agree
Legitimizing tactics	The agent seeks to establish the legitimacy of a request or to verify the authority to make it by referring to rules, policies, contracts, or precedent
Pressure	The agent uses demands, threats, frequent checking, or persistent reminders to influence the target to carry out a request

**Table I.**  
Influence tactics

Many of these tactics are aimed at influencing those lower down the organisational hierarchy rather than across and upwards. The only tactic identified by Yukl as working upwards (and indeed in all directions) is rational persuasion, which is rated as highly effective. Tactics, which work laterally are personal appeal (moderately effective) and coalition (low to moderate effectiveness). This suggests that to influence decision makers we need to have good, rational arguments, get others on board and foster good relationships.

Others have identified other models of influence and many have some congruence with Yukl. Manning *et al.* (2008a, 2008b, 2008c) outline six influence strategies, three influence styles and five personality models. The relationship between these variables is mapped and some statistical significance found. Team role behaviour (based on Belbin's model) is also considered alongside influencing behaviour. There is no distinction made between upward and downward influence. Earlier work by Manning and Robertson (2003a, 2003b, 2004) looks at negotiation as an influence method and considers the correlation between influence styles and negotiating skills. The overall conclusion is that different situations require different influence strategies.

Marshall Goldsmith (2008a) gives three quick tips on managing up: sell your idea and take responsibility for it; focus on the larger good, not on achieving individual objectives; provide a realistic cost-benefit analysis, acknowledging the fact that

something else may have to be sacrificed for your idea to go ahead. A later article expands these three tips to ten rules (Goldsmith, 2008b).

It is interesting that Yukl's definition given above includes the word "intentionally"; Roberts and Rowley (2008, p. 212) are clear that influencing must reflect "authenticity and congruence" rather than just being a set of skills to be learned. Cialdini (2001) and Hoy and Smith (2007, p. 79) advise against using influence strategies in a manipulative way.

### **Influencing the "core group"**

Decisions in organisations are made by a smallish number of influential people, so membership of, or access to, this group is important. Kleiner (2003, p. 666) uses the term "core group theory" and argues that core groups are "the tangible, but fluid repositories of knowledge, influence and power in organisations". Core groups in this context are not just the senior management group of the organisation (although they may well be members) but all the people who are significant within that organisation at that time.

There are some studies of particular occupational groups, for example Reber and Berger (2006) looked at public relations (PR) practitioners and their access to core groups and discovered that they were most influential in crisis situations but less so in strategic planning. They list eight "tenets" about influence and PR practitioners. Kelly and Gennard (2007) looked at Human Resources (HR) directors and concluded that although they may not be part of the formal decision making processes (they were not members of top level committees for example) there are informal ways to influence such as maintaining good relations with the Chief Executive of the organisation and taking the opportunity to make presentations and attend away days when invited. Munn, musing on university librarians, saw them as "not normally part of either the administrative inner circle itself or the select group of faculty oligarchs and entrepreneurs whose views carry great weight. They are thus excluded from the real decision-making process of the institution" (Munn, 1968, p. 51).

A few studies consider whether influence can be exerted by developing a wider knowledge of the "business" of the organisation as well as competence in ones functional specialism (Reber and Berger, 2006; Kelly and Gennard, 2007). Margerison (1984) studied British Chief Executive Officers and asked what they considered were critical for the development of their own careers – they all saw width of business experience as crucial. This suggests that taking on wider roles within an organisation (as Munn and Deemer did in their universities) would be beneficial, however this needs to be balanced against the possibility that people within the team defer to leaders who show expertise (Cialdini, 2001).

### **Leadership style**

Does leadership style affect influencing strategies? Much has been written in recent years about transformational and transactional leadership styles (see Roberts and Rowley, 2008 for a useful summary of leadership theories): very briefly, transformational leaders inspire and motivate others to build a shared vision whilst transactional leaders reward others in return for work towards a prescribed goal. Charbonneau (2004) studied Canadian military personnel for those influence tactics linked theoretically with transformational leadership – rational persuasion,

consultation, collaboration and inspirational appeal. Lateral relationships were examined to see if there was a correlation between influence styles and perception of transformational leadership. The findings suggest “that training in rational persuasion and inspirational appeals may increase perceptions of transformational leadership style” (p. 565). Bono and Anderson (2005) looked at the links between transformational leaders and social networks to see if transformational leaders are seen as influential; they found managers who are higher on the transformational side tend to hold more central positions within organisations’ advice and influence networks, as do their direct reports. This could suggest that fostering a transactional leadership style could help to increase influence within organisations although there is not an overwhelming evidence base. Roberts and Rowley (2008, p. 71) assert that the “literature on transformational leadership in the information profession is woefully thin”.

### **Influencing up and the information professional**

Literature on information professionals and influencing upwards is as “woefully thin” as that on transactional leadership in the information profession. This can be illustrated by the fact that a recent article in the library press entitled “Getting onto the agenda” (Linn, 2008) contains no references to the library literature whatsoever.

Although the literature is thin there is recognition of the importance of influencing skills for library leaders, examples include:

- The National Library for Health in England is currently advertising a series of Influencing Skills Workshops for NHS librarians ([www.library.nhs.uk/forlibrarians/staffdevelopment/0809stdevprog/influencingskills](http://www.library.nhs.uk/forlibrarians/staffdevelopment/0809stdevprog/influencingskills)).
- The current IFLA President, Cludia Lux, has getting libraries on to the political agenda as her presidential theme for 2007-9 ([www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/papers/106-Lux-en.pdf](http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/papers/106-Lux-en.pdf)).
- The UK professional body, CILIP, has a new online campaign toolkit to help librarians create an action plan to demonstrate value which has a section on influencing decision makers and key stakeholders ([www.cilip.org.uk/policyadvocacy/campaign/default.htm](http://www.cilip.org.uk/policyadvocacy/campaign/default.htm)).

On a practical level, Linn (2008) advocates thinking strategically when trying to get library concerns onto an institutional agenda; examples are taken from US federal government and applied to the library situation to offer some practical strategies. The most obvious way to get onto the agenda is for a crisis of some kind to emerge, so, for example, a health and safety issue will push some items to the top more quickly. Other “crises” could include reputational matters, so for the UK academic library a drop in league table position – such as the National Student Survey (which includes a question on learning resources) – may lead to an increase in funding. Crises aside, librarians have to become “active policy entrepreneurs” in order to influence the agenda. Some factors can help: user demand (especially issues which will affect a large number of people or which will have a dramatic effect on a smaller number), linking the issue to the wider organisational objectives, getting support from powerful people within the organisation, making the task seem incremental rather than imposing. Those seeking to influence should make sure that they have a preferred way to address an issue (have a solution already thought through) and have this ready in advance so that if a crisis

does happen they are in a position to influence the reaction, in fact they need to actively watch out for opportunities to advance the library's agenda in this way.

Roberts and Rowley (2008), when discussing influential leadership for the information profession, contrast influence strategies or tactics with influence arising from personal values. They believe that the values, which underpin the information profession, can be influential within organisations, in particular: a belief in the value of information; accessibility to information, services and support; customer focus and social inclusion. As well as these underpinning values there are competences (in leadership, management and information) which working in an information unit develop, such as a focus on quality enhancement and being viewed by others as contributing to "the common good" (p. 214). These make a strong case for libraries becoming leading organisations, which influence the parent organisation but also the library profession and others outside of the sector (see Table II).

### Conclusion

The nature of organisations has changed over the last half century from having a predominance of manual workers to ones with a majority of knowledge workers. It is taken for granted today that much of the world lives in increasingly knowledge-based societies and economies. In contrast to the past this often means that the worker is

The organisation	Leadership style	The message
Build good social networks and enlist allies to your cause Identify the core group and maintain good relations with them Engage with the wider organisation by working outside the library (perhaps on a secondment) or by serving on organisation-wide committees. This builds knowledge of the organisation to complement your own specialist knowledge Consider how the values and competencies inherent in information work can add value to other parts of the organisation, take an holistic approach and work collaboratively Become an active policy entrepreneur, take advantage of any opportunities to advance the library's agenda (make presentations, attend away days) Make the needs of users or customers your priority	Practice transformational leadership, in particular develop rational persuasion and inspirational appeal influence strategies Use different strategies to those employed to influence downwards, match the strategy to the situation Maintain congruence between your values and your message. Make it authentic	Be prepared to sell your idea and to take responsibility for it Focus on the larger good not on achieving individual objectives Provide a realistic cost-benefit analysis Develop a preferred way to address an issue and have this ready in advance so that if a crisis does happen you are in a position to influence the reaction Use user demand to back up arguments, especially issues which will affect a large number of people or which will have a dramatic effect on a smaller number Make the task/resolution seem incremental rather than imposing

**Table II.**  
Learning from the literature: strategies for influencing up

more specialist and knows more about a job than their manager does. In society generally there will be individuals who, because of their access to information, can be more informed than the expert (so in the UK there is the rise of the “expert patient”, i.e. the patient who is informed enough to become an active partner in taking decisions about their health care). Knowledge organisations logically should be supportive of libraries, but the very ubiquity of information has led, in some cases, to a downgrading of the position of the library as “everything is on the web now”. It would seem imperative then that library and information professionals are skilled at influencing up to demonstrate their worth within organisations (especially in times of scarce resources). We can no longer rely on being seen as a “Good Thing” as Munn could in 1968 but need to show that our underlying values and beliefs add worth to organisations in the ways that Rowley and Roberts suggest. Flatter organisational structures and the blurring of traditional boundaries between departments mean that we have to develop new models of working. Back in 1967 management guru Peter Drucker wrote that the majority of people in organisations “tend to focus downward” being more concerned with efforts than results, the result of this is that “. . . they render themselves ineffectual” (Drucker, 1967, p. 44), developing ways of influencing up should help to make us more effective.

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**Corresponding author**

Roisin Gwyer can be contacted at: [roisin.gwyer@port.ac.uk](mailto:roisin.gwyer@port.ac.uk)

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