

## POSITION PAPER

# Five Forms of Influence

## To be and not to be—and to do and not to do

by Nicholas Dungan

The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, was among the first to demonstrate that the art of persuasion is something that can be taught, and learned. ‘Aristotle sought to grasp the very roots of persuasion itself, which required him to ponder the nature of character and emotion.... Thus persuasiveness becomes for the first time a fully systematic and even scientific exercise; it can indeed be taught, but only by a deep grasp of some of the central features of human nature.’<sup>1</sup>

This art of persuasion is the science of soft skills, the art of influence. We are of course talking of *authentic* influence, which is both legitimate on the part of the person exercising influence and voluntary on the part of the person being influenced (see the CogitoPraxis position paper ‘The Art of Authentic Influence’).

Within this science of soft skills, five forms of influence stand out: diplomacy, seduction, language, silence and drama.

### **Diplomacy**

Professional diplomacy—the practice of relations between states—includes representation, negotiation and administration. In everyday parlance, diplomacy refers principally to the representational aspect, reaching out to ‘the other’. In one classic text, aptly entitled *Diplomacy*, by Harold Nicolson, the author writes: ‘These, then, are the qualities of my ideal diplomatist. Truth, accuracy, calm, patience, good temper, modesty and loyalty. ... But, the reader may object, you have forgotten intelligence, knowledge, discernment, prudence, hospitality, charm, industry, courage and even tact. I have not forgotten them. I have taken them for granted.’<sup>2</sup> If we wish to exercise influence by reaching out to the other, we could do worse than to listen to Nicolson.

### **Seduction**

Virtually the opposite of reaching out to the other, seduction implies attracting the other to us. We work to make ourselves as appealing as possible, then do as little as possible to project that appeal. Seduction incorporates a strong component of mystery and is an especially powerful form of influence because we seek to occupy the imagination of the other. But seduction can backfire if

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<sup>1</sup> H. C. Lawson-Tancred. Introduction to Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*. London: Penguin Books.1991. p. 8

<sup>2</sup> Harold Nicolson. *Diplomacy*. London: Oxford University Press. 1939, p. 126.

no other comes to us. We will be disappointed, and perhaps look extremely foolish, if nothing happens. Seduction can be potent, and dangerous.

## **Language**

Words, spoken and written, are the most obvious form of influence. This is why Aristotle's study on the art of persuasion is called *Rhetoric*. We use words every day, all the time. But words are not neutral. Words have consequences. The key to using words is awareness: self-awareness, awareness of the other, situational awareness. Everything we say, and especially how we say it, reflects on us. As George Bernard Shaw wrote in his introduction to *Pygmalion*: 'It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman despise him.'<sup>3</sup> We will all be judged by the clarity with which we express ourselves. The respect we show for language is the respect we show for others and they will be keenly sensitive to that.

## **Silence**

Just as seduction is a seemingly passive form of influence compared to diplomacy, so silence is a seemingly passive form of influence compared to language. Silence, like seduction, incorporates a strong component of mystery and seeks to occupy the imagination of the other. Charles de Gaulle, in his masterpiece on leadership, *Le Fil de l'épée*, states: 'Nothing reinforces authority better than silence'.<sup>4</sup> Silence is a strong form of influence because the other doesn't know what we are thinking; but, like seduction, it is dangerous, because we also do not know what the other is thinking.

## **Drama**

Influence through drama, in the broadest sense, is influence through spectacle, theatricality, putting on a show. As William Shakespeare wrote: 'All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players; / They have their exits and their entrances, / And one man in his time plays many parts.'<sup>5</sup> The use of drama in exercising influence need not be confined to royal weddings and stirring parades. We must pay attention to appearances in our everyday lives, even to our Zoom backdrop, for the impression we create—how we play the part of ourselves—will determine how we are perceived, and how effective our influence will be.

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<sup>3</sup> George Bernard Shaw. Introduction to *Pygmalion*. London. 1912.

<sup>4</sup> Charles de Gaulle. *Le Fil de l'épée*. Paris: Éditions Berger-Levrault. 1944. Quotation from new edition 2010. Éditions Perrin. p.77.

<sup>5</sup> William Shakespeare. *As You Like It*. Act II, scene vii.