

POSITION PAPER

Main Methods of Influence

‘By indirections find directions out’

by Nicholas Dungan

The art of influence ought to be authentic.¹

This science of soft skills can be exercised in several different forms.²

And the deployment of influence can make use of a number of identifiable methods.

Give it to them straight: targeting the consumer

Advertising is the most obvious method of attempting to exercise influence. Traditionally, whether in print, on radio or on television, advertising, with more or less directness, sent a message to the consumer: buy this product. In our own day, on the internet, advertising has become more subtle and, some would argue, more sinister, such as in the ability to manipulate democratic processes. On Facebook or Twitter, on Instagram, and even to some degree, in a more corporate context, on LinkedIn, advertising is blended into the other, reputedly credible content we consume—and is far more pervasive and sophisticated than old-fashioned product placement in the cinema, such as James Bond’s Omega wristwatch.

In addition, advertising has become person-to-person, not just business-to-consumer. Previously, methods of advertising passed through ‘creative’ agencies, as depicted in *Mad Men*. Today, you can advertise yourself or your product or your service all by yourself, on social media. But the fact remains that you are often targeting your audience directly: hear my message, open my post, .Like my Tweet.

The success or failure of this direct method of influence is fairly binary: it works or it doesn’t.

Professionalising the process: public relations

Communications firms, such as Brunswick, Edelman, Hill+Knowlton Strategies and a host of other big and small companies, specialise in crafting and conveying messages on behalf of their clients. In the earlier, simpler form of public relations, the PR agency shaped the client’s message and sought to sell it to the mainstream media. Nowadays, the range of services of the PR firms has

¹ See CogitoPraxis position paper, ‘The Art of Authentic Influence’.

² See CogitoPraxis position paper, ‘Five Forms of Influence’.

broadened, the type of outlets that they aim for has become vastly more varied and the multiplicity of audiences which they target has increased.

PR is still about selling a message, but with greater professional expertise and, when done well, with less uncertainty, with at least some ability to measure the actual impact of the effort.

Cultivating the decision-makers: lobbying and advocacy

Advocacy takes advertising and PR to a different dimension. If advertising seems rather scattered and PR has a fairly elusive result, advocacy—particularly in the form of corporate lobbying—is more focused in its message and its targeting, and more precise in determining its outcome.

Advocacy generally and lobbying specifically are aimed at government decision-makers—whether legislators, regulators or other administrative officials—in whose decisions the lobbyists and their clients have a direct stake. Many lobbyists are lawyers with long experience in cultivating the decision-makers and even drafting the legislation or regulations their clients desire. Most of these clients are multinational enterprises whether in pharmaceuticals or other industries, or in banking, insurance or other financial services. The clients know what they want, the lobbyists know who to target and it is easy to measure success: did the client get the results it was after from that target.

Other forms of advocacy are harder to gauge, such as issue-based environmental advocacy, or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) advocating for social justice or human rights. But the target audiences generally still consist of persons in authority.

Don't listen to me, listen to them

Endorsement is an especially effective form of influence. If I boast of my abilities, or promote my organisation's products, or advocate for my favourite causes, you will believe me only so far. If, on the other hand, I can produce satisfied customers, admiring colleagues or convincing evidence provided by a (supposedly) independent third party, particularly by recognised experts, that endorsement will increase my influence precisely because I am not attempting to exercise that influence myself. This is a strategy of indirect approach.

***'Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember.'* –Benjamin Franklin**

By far the most lasting method of influence is education. We need to recognise that education is not telling, it is teaching. The Socratic method, whereby the teacher inspires the student to learn on her or his own, is far more effective than an hour-long monologue lecture. We all remember our best professors; and we remember not just what they taught us, but that it was they who taught us.

Whether using advertising, or public relations, or advocacy, or endorsement, the most enduring and appealing method of influence is to educate our target audience, to impart new ways of thinking and communicate new knowledge and wisdom to 'the other' whom we are seeking to influence. That 'other' will normally react with appreciation and admiration.