

# The Art of Influencing and Persuasion: How Managers Can Put ‘Square Pegs’ into ‘Round Holes’

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## Abstract

The ability to influence and persuade others at work has become an increasingly important managerial skill to achieve work goals and objectives to drive businesses forward in today's demanding and competitive work environments. This paper investigates and provides a deeper understanding of what positive effects knowledge and application of the concepts of influencing and persuasion can have on managers, the people they manage and the organisations they work for. The results show that the performance of managers is positively influenced by how they influence and persuade people at work. The outcome of a literature review suggests that there is no conclusive evidence of what makes an effective manager at work that is good at influencing and persuading others. Outputs from face to face and a focus group meeting with final year social psychology students from the Universidad de Oriente in Santiago de Cuba closed this gap by suggesting an effective influencing and persuasion skills set that, when applied appropriately, could guide managers how to influence and persuade others successfully. The outcome of this research is applicable and relevant to managers in any working environment such as Telecommunications, Utilities, Banking or Automotive. The proposed skills set of what makes an effective influencing and persuading manager at work can be applied globally although the prevailing cultural diversities in different countries should be considered.

**Keywords:** Influencing, Persuading, Attitudes, Work performance, Managing people

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1 Introduction*

According to Fisher and Santana Gonzalez (2013), the role of managers has changed from just being responsible for the delivery of work and the day to day management of their team members to creating opportunities for companies to grow their business. It appears that Human Resources (HR) departments within organizations have delegated more of the day to day management of people to managers, too. This means that managers need to focus their attention much more on how to get the best out of their team members to meet the new demanding business challenges set by key stakeholders. Senior management in many companies is now expecting their managers to optimise available resources. In business terms, this means delivering more in less time, with fewer people, within reduced budgets and to higher levels of quality. This has created tensions at work that need to be managed effectively and appropriately and must not be ignored. Companies need motivated and productive staff that carry out their duties effectively and therefore ensure that the business remains profitable and prosperous. To get the best out of their people, managers need to find new ways and means of motivating and leading team members to achieve these new challenges successfully. Figure 1 is a graphical presentation of the relationship between managers' attitudes and behaviours, influence and persuasion and how this affects the performance levels of people at work. This research investigates how a better understanding and the practical application of the concepts of influencing and persuasion can provide managers with improved managing people skills to deliver the new expectations. In the context of this research, the researchers adopted the definitions for 'persuasion' and 'influence' considered by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) and Carnegie (2011). According to Aristotle, successful influencers strive to blend three criteria in order to achieve the goal of moving people from A to B: first, *ethos* relates to the source credibility of the influencer and their sincerity that exudes from them; second, *pathos* relates to the stirring of the emotions in other people, in other words, to have empathy and third *logos* which refers to the actual words used by the influencer. This includes stories, quotations and facts. Effective influencing means to show open respect for the values, needs and desires of others, affirm these with them and then offer these to them in a mutually beneficial package (Carnegie, 2011). Effective influencers leave others a little bit 'better off' after each interaction with them. Regular small opportunities to influence a little bit at a time will achieve the biggest differences in the long term. In the context of this research, the researchers suggest that persuasion is for immediate application and that influencing is more concerned with long term/ long lasting desired outcomes. Influencing and persuading skills can be applied universally and irrespective of the industry managers operate within. Managers must consider cultural differences and make appropriate modifications to their approach to take into account the different values, beliefs and constructs people from diverse cultural backgrounds hold.

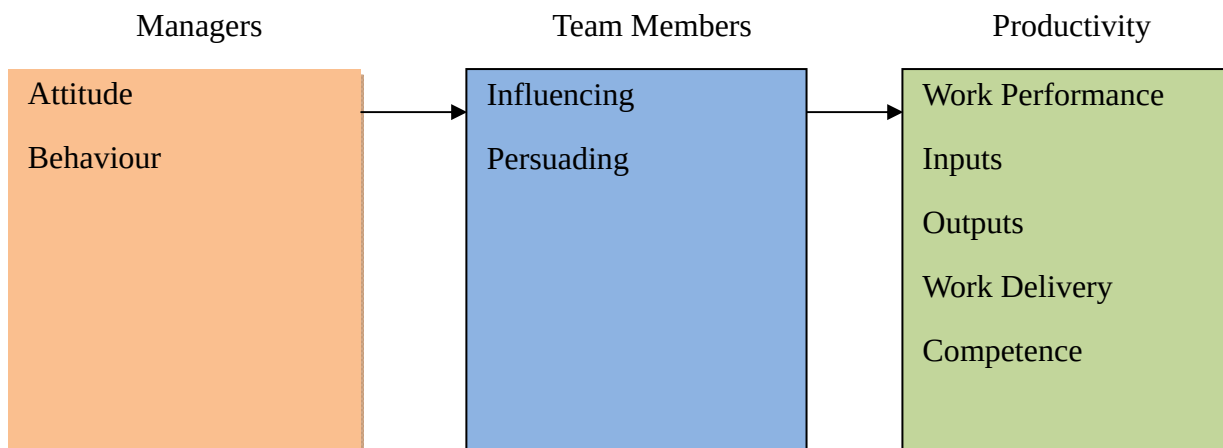


Figure 1. The Relationship between Managers' Attitude, Influencing/Persuading Others and Achieving Higher Levels of Productivity within their Teams

A review of contemporary and classic literature is presented next, followed by the main research questions, research hypotheses and the knowledge gap from the literature review. This forms the theoretical framework of this research and is followed by a presentation of the outputs from face to face interviews and a focus group meeting with final year students of social psychology to try and close the knowledge gap considered in section 1.3. The research methodology is presented next, including details of the research data analysis. This is followed by the research results and the discussion of what the research found. This is concluded in the final section which includes this research's limitations and suggestions for future research.

## 1.2 Literature Review

### 1.2.1 Influencing and Persuasion

According to Gardner (2006), the phenomenon of changing minds is one of the least examined and perhaps least understood of familiar human experiences. Gardner suggests that that some aspects of mind changing are likely to remain an art of the foreseeable future. Minds are hard to change. And yet so many aspects of, for example, working lives are oriented towards doing just that—convincing a team member to approach a task in a new way or for a leader to eradicate one of their own prejudices. Leaders almost by definition are people who change minds. Gardner defines changing minds as a situation 'where individuals or groups abandon the way in which they have customarily thought about an issue of importance and henceforth conceive of it in a new way. Gardner quotes Koch (1998) who suggests that the approach developed by the Italian economist and sociologist Vilfredo Pareto should be applied to become more effective and efficient. He questions the need to spend equal time, for example, on all work activities. The 80/20 principle is best described as a concept. Human beings think in concepts. The 80/20 principle may seem at first abstract or elusive but soon becomes familiar and comfortable. To achieve, for example, the timely

delivery of some programming work, one should put one's efforts where the greatest achievements can be delivered.

Koch suggests that 80% of what is important can be achieved with only 20% of effort (Fig.2).

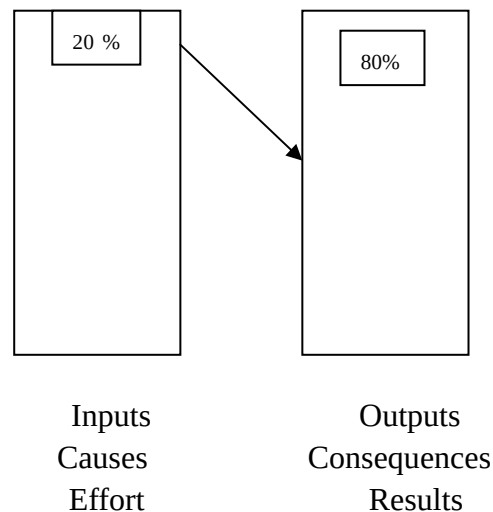


Figure 2. The 80/20 Principle adapted from Koch (1998)

Benoit and Benoit (2008) consider that an understanding of how persuasion works is useful for people because people both send messages as sources and receive persuasive messages as audiences or targets for both situations. It is important to understand what persuasive communication is and how it works. Whenever people want to influence others through messages (speaking, writing or using pictures and symbols), they need to understand how persuasion works in order to increase the likelihood that people's messages will be successful. It is of equal importance to understand that persuasion is also reciprocal-others are trying to influence the influencer, too. Persuasion should be thought of as something, for example, leaders or managers want as the achievement of a goal often depends on others. Benoit and Benoit further consider that messages affect people's attitudes. They suggest that there are four possibilities for this:

1. Learning a message and not being persuaded by it
2. not learning a message but still being persuaded by the topic of the message
3. to learn a message and be persuaded
4. not to learn a message and fail to be persuaded

It appears that persuasion is related to what we think. It is important to consider that attitude change occurs when people think favourable thoughts about a message and/or its topic. The reverse applies to unfavourable messages. Petty et al. (2005) point out that some persuasive messages that people confront, have direct personal implications for their lives. For example,

the need to achieve more in less time with fewer resources at work will be of high interest to people as it will affect them personally. Petty et al. consider that post-message attitudes as a function of personal relevance and argument quality are important. For example, argument quality is a more important determinant of persuasion when personal relevance is high rather than low.

Petty et al. consider in conclusion that many variables can influence persuasion by affecting either the number of thoughts that are generated or whether those thoughts tend to be positive or negative. The more favourable thoughts that people have, the greater the likelihood of persuasion; the more negative thoughts that people have, the greater the likelihood of resistance or even a boomerang effect, for example, changing in a direction opposite to the one advocated. Sampere (2011) suggests that influencing others is about the force or psychological induction that a person exercises over another person to influence them to do something or to believe in something the other person wants them to believe in. It is necessary to engage a person's cognitive system to achieve these desires. Influencing will be much stronger and longer lasting by using this approach. The influencer will be able to convince the other person much easier and with conviction to, for example, follow a concept or idea without questioning its possibility or viability. Couto (2000) suggests that influencing involves convincing another person to accept one's point of view in a voluntary way and for the right reasons. In the day to day life people constantly influence themselves how they think and feel about things but rarely persuade themselves to actually follow this through. The difference between both influencing and persuading in this context is how people's will to do something is applied and engaged. People often influence unintentionally, based on how they come across to other people and how others perceive, for example, their social standing or professional standing in the world. Being envious of other people can also lead to people letting themselves being influenced so they can become like the other person. Perloff (2003) suggests that just about anything that involves moulding or shaping attitudes involves persuasion. Persuasive communications have been used by good people to implement change. Persuasion is applied in business to bring about desired changes of, for example, how to work or think differently when it comes to business practices. A person with good persuasion skills can also become a more effective speaker or presenter, and a more critical judge of social influence attempts. Perloff defines persuasion as "a symbolic process in which communications try to convince other people to change their attitudes or behaviours regarding an issue, through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice" (p. 8). Borg (2010), based on the outcome of some research in the behavioural sciences, considers that empathy and sincerity are the building blocks for successful persuasion. Borg considers that empathy is the ability to identify and understand the other person's feelings, ideas and situation. It is about being able to read emotions in other people, it is about understanding how the other person feels about things and being able to experience another person's perspective. An important point Borg makes is that this motivates people to reach for outcomes that not only leave people feeling good but also leave the other person in the same frame of mind. Borg refers to this as a detached involvement (Fig.3).

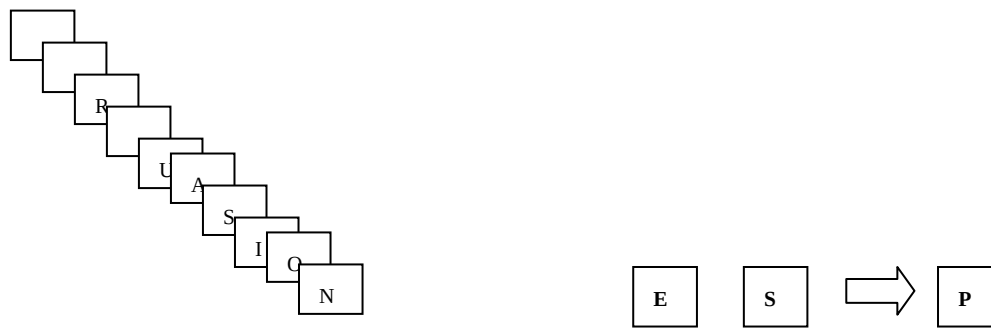


Figure 3. The Building Blocks of Persuasion (adapted from Borg (2010))

Smart (2003) suggests that managers need to understand these if they wish to influence, for example, team members to create an effectiveness within people that is based on being happy for ‘healthy’ reasons. Smart considers the Johari Window developed by Luft and Ingham (1955) to help, for example, managers to better understand themselves and others. They suggest that there are certain things in life people are aware/not aware of or that they do not consciously realize. This is equally true to say for others who are/are not aware of certain things and do also not know certain things. For example, if someone knows that they are good at listening to others and understanding them and others also know this, then others will have more faith in this person and the person is more likely to be successful in building effective personal relationships. This requires managers to take people from the first stage of unconscious incompetence to the highly desirable stage of unconscious competence. The fourth window is the desired final stage that managers should achieve with their team members. It means that people do no longer think about doing the right things but that they are doing it always for the right reasons (Table 2).

Table 2. The four stages of Conscious/Unconscious Competence/Incompetence (Luft and Ingham, 1955)

|                                                                                                |                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.Unconscious Incompetence<br>-we do not know what we do not know                              | 2.Conscious Incompetence<br>-we realise we need to learn something                                      |
| 3.Conscious Competence<br>-we are mastering a skill but still have to concentrate all the time | 4.Unconscious Competence<br>-we do not think about it anymore, we do it automatically (such as driving) |

Fisher (2011) considers, based on the outcomes of some research, that people need to show open and honest concerns for and genuine interests in the people they work with. Play-acting is an acceptable behaviour when applied from time to time, for example to reinforce some of the natural behaviours of others. Managers, for example, must not use this to coerce people into carrying out unprofessional or unethical actions. They must not use people as a means to an end as this appears to lead to short-term fixes only. It is important that managers convince,

influence or impress others in order to support their agenda, or the desire to have a specific impact or effect on others. Managers should influence others by selling them the benefit, for example, why they should change so that people can see the benefit and make the appropriate changes to their behaviour or attitude.

Managers need to share with others what it feels like to work in a highly successful team so they adopt the behaviours that are associated with success. Managers can also influence others in such a way that people unblock the values and beliefs they hold and thus help themselves to develop their abilities to do things and their level of self-confidence. The work of Johnson (2005) in the context of this research is important. Managers who have authentic needs to influence or persuade their team members need to know and understand why persuasion, and not coercion, is the more appropriate way to get others to do what managers want them to do, in a positive and genuine way. Things done by consent are certainly longer-lasting, much stronger and far more reliable than anything coercion can ever achieve. Johnson suggests that a coercive solution will not work when it comes to influencing or persuading people at work. Johnson considers that persuasion is a much better solution.

### *1.3 Knowledge Gap*

The literature review from this current research has confirmed that there is a need to develop and train managers in the effective use of influencing and persuasion skills so they can meet or exceed the expected and rising work performance levels set by their Senior Management. Established subject matter experts suggest that it is through the appropriate application of these skills that it is possible to improve the work delivery capabilities and competences of individuals and teams. It appears that companies have not trained and developed their managers to live up to the new demands placed upon them. They based their training and development more on historical management approaches such as Management by Objectives (MBO) and Annual Performance Reviews (APR). This allowed a shortfall to develop between what companies are now expecting of their managers in terms of work performance and the people skills managers need to have to respond to these expectations. This current research is about the researchers' perception about the nature of the shortfall of what they perceive used to be considered appropriate skills in working with people managers applied in the past and what people skills managers need to have in future, due to the changes in working practices that changed as a result of increases in pressure to achieve better performance levels at work. The outcome of the literature review has been valuable but not conclusive on its own what makes an effective influencing and persuading manager. The practical insights from practitioners from face to face and focus group meetings will help to close the knowledge gap.

### *1.4 Main Research Questions/Hypotheses*

The main research questions for this research are:

1. What existing and new influencing skills have developed over the years that can be considered appropriate for managers to adopt now to become more effective people managers in the new working environments?



2. Does a potential shortcoming exist between the influencing skills managers used to have to manage people at work effectively, and the influencing skills they need to have now to manage people at work more effectively, to meet the stretching and challenging demands placed upon them by their companies and the working environments and practices?

3. What makes an effective manager who is good at influencing people?

4. How can the contributions to knowledge from this research be practically applied in work situations globally?

The following hypotheses were constructed:

H1: Managers with highly developed influencing skills are more likely to succeed in the new and increasingly challenging work environments

H2: Attitude, Behaviour and Competence are the driving forces behind effective influencing

H3: Empathy and sincerity are the building blocks of persuasion

## **2. Research Methodology**

### *2.1 Method*

The researchers applied a constructivist interpretivist research approach within a phenomenological research paradigm. They considered that this was most appropriate and defensible in order to make a valid and reliable contribution to knowledge. The outcome of this research is applicable to both academics and practitioners. The aim and purpose of this research is to suggest what makes an effective influencing and persuading manager. As such, it is important that managers can experience the new skills themselves to confirm that these are valid. The researchers consider that the change in working environments and working practices (Section 1.1) is the likely reason why managers need to change how they manage people now. This has necessitated the search for new managing people skills. Influencing and persuading are considered to have the biggest impact to get others to work differently or to do different work. Thirteen final year students from the Faculty of Humanities and thirty-three students from the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Universidad de Oriente (UO) in Santiago de Cuba were interviewed by the researchers during face to face and focus group meetings. The researchers who have over 50 years of theoretical and practical work experience between them and as such were acting as participatory observers to facilitate this research. The interviews were conducted in early 2013 in Santiago and recorded verbatim to ensure that all responses were captured correctly, including meaning as intended. Interviews were semi-structured. Participants' ages ranged from 20 years to 22 years and they had between three and four years of practical work experience. The participants were asked how they define the concepts of influencing and persuasion based on their own theoretical and practical experiences from the past and the present. The researchers then focused their attention on capturing what the participants considered to be the value to managers to not only know about these concepts but what the likely practical values would be to managers to apply this new knowledge in their work environments.

Table 3 is a summary of the questions that were asked during the face to face and focus group meetings. The first objective of the face to face interviews was to review the outcome of the literature review and confirm whether the research data from the literature review was relevant and admissible as evidence for this research. The second objective was to consider



how managers can apply influencing and persuasion skills in a practical way in real life work situations and to confirm what makes an effective influencing and persuading manager. The purpose of the focus group was to review the contributions the individuals made during the face to face meetings, in a group environment, to check whether these findings, together with the outcome from the literature review, could be improved. The focus group reviewed and checked the findings from the literature review and the face to face interviews and made final recommendations that would be of practical value to managers.

Table 3. Research Scope for face to face and focus group meetings

|                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. What is your definition of influencing/persuasion?                            |
| 2. What does a good influencer/persuader look like?                              |
| 3. What are the skills you associate with good effective influencing/persuading? |
| 4. What potential problems do you associate with influencing/persuading others?  |

## *2.2 Data Collection, Interpretation and Triangulation*

The researchers considered three methods to collect relevant research data to answer the main research questions and hypotheses from Section 1.4: a review of the literature (Section 1.2), face to face interviews (Section 3.1) and a focus group meeting (Section 3.2), within the context of a phenomenological research paradigm and an associated constructivist interpretivist research approach. They have added their own interpretations of what makes a future effective people manager in their role as a participant observers, based on their extensive practical knowledge and experience as members of the community of practice, in order to obtain different perceptions of the phenomena under investigation. Data was collected over different time frames and from different sources. The researchers applied triangulation as a means to use a combination of different methods in order to reduce reliance on a single method.

## **3. Results**

### *3.1 Face to Face Interviews*

Thirteen final year students from the Faculty of Humanities placed a high importance on managers developing and applying effective influencing and persuasion skills at work. They considered that these are skills to manage people well for reasons such as getting people to perform at their best and to motivate and encourage them to work in different ways. They suggested that managers need to improve their abilities to convince others to do things that they would normally not do. Managers need to change how their team members think and act at work so that staff under their control can make tangible and valuable contributions to achieve business objectives and thus help to grow the business.

Effective influencers are good communicators and active listeners. They earn the respect of others by showing through their display of attitude and behaviour that they really care for others in an authentic and genuine way. They do not play act and suggest to others, for

example, to do things differently or to do different things. They suggest rather than force or demand. Positive influencing scored highly amongst the students. They considered that some managers misuse their position of power to influence others to do things, for example, which are not in their best interests. It appears that this is acceptable in some cultures as a means of getting the work done irrespective of the consequences. The students who were interviewed individually identified what they considered are the skills, attitudes and behaviours of an effective influencing and persuading manager:

1 What is your definition of influencing? “It is about one person making other people think about or do things the way they think or do, to achieve their goals” (Rosalia). “Convincing others to do or believe something by using certain skills or information to achieve this” (Yiset). “For me, it is the skill to change other people’s attitudes, thoughts or behaviours” (Ana Maria). “I think that influencing is the capacity people have over others to control them” (Susi). “In my opinion, influencing is about making other people do something that they would not do otherwise” (Maria). “It’s a kind of manipulation to change or adjust another person’s attitude, resulting in a change to their behavior” (Iudira). “Influencing is the capacity to make others do what you want them to do or think”(Damiana). “Influencing for me is when you make other people do all you want them to do, positive or negative” (Yarlenis). “Influencing for me is when the behaviour of other people can take away some parts of us over which we had total control until then” (Dennis). “It’s the capacity that someone has to make other people do or think what that person wants, for example, a leader who uses his position of power over a group of people” (Adriana). “Change someone’s way of thinking in a positive way so that you achieve desired results with their help” (Zaidi). “I would define influencing as the capability or ability that a person has to make another person behave in a certain way and in accordance with the interests of the influencer” (Brusaida).

2. What does a good influencer look like? “A good influencer earns the respect of others which, in turn, leads to others following them. He is outgoing, talkative and has the best interests of others and the world in mind” (Rosalia). “He must be a trustworthy person who is self-confident and secure. He suggests and does not command, leading by example, is open-minded and inspires others at all times” (Yiset). “Good influencers are self-confident and smart people. They use language well to convince others and make good use of excellent body language skills. Making others feel comfortable is part of their repertoire of influencing skills”(Yamelio and Susi). “He must be a good listener, be good at analyzing things to decide which way to go. He must be a good communicator and have small talk skills. Must have good people skills” (Iudira, Damiana and Yarlenis). “Effective influencers are good at convincing others and at communicating well the meaning of what they want to persuade others to believe is the right thing to do”(Dennis, Adriana and Zaidi). “I associate effective influencing with good listening skills, being smart, charismatic and having good communication skills” (Brusaida).

3. What potential problems do you associate with influencing other people? “Leaders or managers of people could misuse their influential positions and not act in the best interests of people and the business. Exploiting people-using people as a means to a personal end-can occur when influencing is applied in a negative way” (Rosalia, Yiset, Ana Maria and

Yamelio). "People sometimes get influenced by someone who already has had feelings and perhaps a negative personality. This person will use his negative influencing skills to make others do unacceptable and bad things and becoming corrupt at work" (Susi, Maria, Damiana and Iudira). "People sometimes have bad intentions and they will misuse others for their own advantage. This potential misuse will always be there but most people probably treat people with respect and do not abuse their influencing skills. It is also a cultural thing as some cultures accept negative influencing as a means to get things done" (Zaidi and Brusaida).

The researchers consider that the contributions from the community of practice -all students have practical experience through working with local communities in Santiago de Cuba- have been invaluable to the quest to answer the main research questions and hypotheses (Section 1.4) to strengthen the presentation of qualitative data, to the presentation of the analysis and interpretation to emphasise the qualitative nature and to the constructivist interpretivist research approach of this current research. The inputs from the community of practice and the researchers' own extensive experiences have provided important insights and contributions to develop and suggest what the skills of an effective influencing and persuading manager are.

### *3.2 Focus Group Meeting*

This focus group was made up of thirty-three final year students from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the UO. Attendees were conversant with current best practice in general and line management which was reinforced by the researchers through a series of short presentations prior to the start of the formal discussions and to set the context for these discussions. The focus group provided additional insights to validate and to check the reliability of the research data from the literature review and the face to face interviews. The focus group confirmed that the research data from the literature review was consistent and admissible. The literature review on its own did not confirm this. The individual interviews did not provide conclusive evidence of what makes an effective influencing and persuading manager. The group confirmed, through relevant and appropriate discussions based on their extensive practical experiences working with local communities what they suggest makes an effective influencing and persuading manager.

1. What is your definition of influencing/persuasion? "It's about working on someone to get them to do what you want them to do, by means of using one's capacity and ability to do so. It can be positive (to help the other person to become better at something) or it can be negative (making the other person to do something that they really do not want to do" (Maylin, Tahimi). "How people talk and communicate with others to convince them that their ideas, for example, are good.

It is about knowing what personality the other person has and then deciding which approach to take to make them do what you want them to do or to make them change their mind" (Liuba, Mayelin). "Positive influencing is about not using people as a means to personal ends but looking after the best interests of the other person and yourself" (Lisset, Rafael). "It is the capacity that some people have to produce a change in other people at behavioural, cognitive or affective level" (Yainara). "Has something to do with psychological processes and includes being assertive and emotionally intelligent to get others to do what you want them to do"

(Lilian, Dayanis, Leudis). “It’s knowing about how to talk to individuals or groups of people and exercising some kind of personal power over these, in a positive and negative way, like a teacher might do to get students to adopt certain attitudes and behaviours. It’s also something to do with how questions are being asked, perhaps to incite others in a certain way to follow the leader” (Nora, Yaislin).

2. What does a good influencer/persuader look like? “Must be an excellent communicator, both verbally and through their body language and respects others so they both can achieve common objectives together.” (Liuba, Lisset). “Changes other peoples’ perspectives and how they feel about things without the need for pushing hard to achieve this. They talk well and incite others to follow their lead or guide. They are almost like a father figure” (Yarelis, Lilian and Geisy). “Someone who is able to move people and resources in such a way that common goals can be achieved, by both individuals and teams. They respect others for what they are and accept openly the personalities they portrait. They apply open and honest communication skills that show the other person that they mean honest business” (Ivan, Maria Isabel). “The power of knowledge and eloquence characterizes an effective influencer and persuader” (Yakelaine). “They get others to do the right things at the right time, with the right attitudes and behaviours, and for the right reasons. It is someone who wishes to change another person’s negative thinking to help them grow and develop in a positive way” (Beatriz, L.H., Maria de la Caridad, Yolanda). “Convincing others in an intelligent and subtle way” (Enma).

3. What are the skills you associate with good and effective influencing/persuading? “Good active listening and an ability to read between the lines of what is being said. They have a high level of self-confidence, are assertive and opportunistic. They use short and to the point communications. They have developed an understanding where other people are coming from and show respect for others at all times. Good influencers have skills to understand what makes others tick and what is important to them” (Maylin, Tahimi, Rafael, Yainara). “Must be good leaders, have tolerance and perseverance and show that they have and take responsibility for what they are doing. They need to be patient, show ethical considerations, be empathic and flexible” (Celia, Katerine, Geisy, Darlys). “Must have credibility and creativity” (Ana Hilda). “Comes across as a person of power and influence. Recognizes behaviours of others and knows how to practically apply this, Has a good vocabulary and talks eloquently. Is good at convincing others, Builds good interpersonal relationships and has charisma” (Leudis, Yakelaine, Yanara, Beatriz, R.G., Yaislin). “Develops positive emotions in people. Shows good personal qualities and comes across as a person who can be trusted. Understands the needs of others” (Mailen, Enma, Patricia).

4. What potential problems do you associate with influencing/persuading? “Ethical issues as the influencer may try to get others to do things that are, for example, illegal. It is possible to create prejudices that lead to misrepresentations of what the person, for example, really is like. Inappropriate influencing can lead to bad reputations of those being influenced” (Maylin, Isabel). “Others may be indirectly forced to act against their will. Exploiting the vulnerability, ignorance and goodwill of others by misusing their emotional weaknesses” (Liuba, Mayelin). “It is possible to create a low self-esteem and sense of insecurity in others when not applied appropriately. It is also possible to create emotional imbalances in people” (Lilian, Katerine,

Dayanis). “It can lead to loss of control over themselves and situations people are in, loss of motivation, for example, to do something or throw people completely of the right track to get something done in the way they originally wanted to do it. It can lead to the formation of criminal gangs or other anti-social behaviours” (Ivan, Leudis, Olga Rachel). “It is quite possible that the person who was actually influenced may bring problems to the person who influenced them in the first place (so-called backfiring). It can led to depression, conflircts and frustration” (Beatriz, R.G., Yolanda, Enma, Yanet). “If the influencer does not achieve what they wish to achieve via others, then it is possible that they will become bad leaders of those they failed to influence” (Patricia).

The focus group members identified that effective influencing and persuasion skills will lead to improved productivity and performance of staff under the control and supervision of managers and their own performance at work. Applying these is what makes an effective influencing and persuading manager. This is crucial. Knowledge on its own about these two concepts is no guarantee for success. Managers need to practically apply these two concepts in every day work situations to test their viabilities and then review success and failure and make appropriate adjustments. The focus group suggested that managers should review how they influence and persuade others on a regular basis as this is an important process. Table 4 is a summary of the application and rankings of the examined influence and persuasion skills set. Results from this research suggest that managers who have and apply this skill set, are more likely to manage themselves and others more effectively. The researchers consider that there is a direct relationship between the skills set and how its application will contribute to improve the managing people skills of managers in a number of ways:

1. Build high performance teams with a ‘Can Do’ attitude
2. Turn people’s negative attitudes into positive ones
3. Convince others to try new ways of working in both familiar and unfamiliar territories
4. Change the mind sets of team members so they put their efforts where the greatest achievements can be delivered
5. For managers to influence themselves and follow through how they feel and think about, for example, new ways of working
6. Improve their effective speaking and presentation skills
7. Improve the resolution of people conflicts

Table 4. Application and Ranking of the examined Influence and Persuasion Skills Set

| Skills Set               | Application                                                                                                                                                                           | Ranking                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Influence and Persuasion | Leading people effectively means to change customary thoughts to new ways of thinking and working                                                                                     | Identified by all parties as being important *                                                                                                                             |
|                          | There is a relationship between the attitude of the influencer and how others respond to it in terms of their willingness to be influenced.                                           | Considered by all parties to be highly important. Members of the focus group suggest that this is an integral part of being an effective influencing /persuading manager * |
|                          | Influencing oneself needs to be followed through to a successful conclusion. This will develop a stronger ability to influence others.                                                | Considered important by the literature review.                                                                                                                             |
|                          | People must not be used as a means to an end. All communications must be genuine and authentic. Showing empathy and sincerity are the building blocks of persuasion.                  | Identified by all parties to be highly important *                                                                                                                         |
|                          | Positive reinforcements are necessary to achieve repeat influencing/persuading. Suggesting rather than forcing or demanding leads to desired results. Play-acting is not appropriate. | Considered important by all parties *                                                                                                                                      |
|                          | Being trustworthy, self-confident and secure are the traits of effective influencing/persuading. Good use of language/body language is imperative.                                    | Identified by all parties as being highly important.*                                                                                                                      |
|                          | Knowledge of what makes an effective influencer/persuader can help organizations to increase the productivity levels of employees.                                                    | Considered important by the literature review.                                                                                                                             |
|                          | It is important to understand what makes others tick and what is important to them. As a result, changes in people's behaviours occur that lead to greater accomplishments.           | Considered important by the literature review and face to face interviews.                                                                                                 |

\*Literature review, face to face interviews and focus group meeting



#### 4. Discussion

It appears that managing people skills are becoming increasingly important to organizations and their managerial staff to drive business forward through their people. Managers have to deliver their own work but also have the responsibility to get the best and the most out of their team members. The pressure is on to create working environments that foster high levels of individual and team performance. The concept of changing people's minds has not been exposed to extensive investigations and appears to be one of the least understood of human experiences (Gardner, 2006). This paper attempts to close this gap by suggesting what makes an effective influencing and persuading manager. If the suggested skills set is adopted and applied appropriately, it is likely that managers will achieve increased levels of productivity within their areas of responsibility. The outcome from the literature review, face to face interviews and a focus group meeting suggests that positive and genuine influencing/persuading affects how people think and feel and that this has a direct impact on how they work and interact with each other. This is not sufficient on its own. Managers need to influence/persuade their team members to develop their influencing/persuading skills, too, so that the attitudes and behaviours of people towards everything they do can be optimised. For managers, this means that they need to learn to follow through their own considered mind changes and not be afraid to share this with others if they wish to strengthen rapport with their team members. They need to experience the effects of mind changes first for themselves, thus leading by example. This will motivate and encourage others to follow their lead. It will develop stronger attitudes within them, for example, to want to work differently or to do different work. When managers exercise positive and genuine influencing/persuading, it is possible that they can achieve higher levels of feelings of significance within their team members. This would lead to higher levels of task performance and productivity. Persuasion is about achieving changes in the perceptions people hold about others, themselves and the world around them. Affective expressions are an integral part of effective persuasion, too. This includes facial expressions, people's behaviour and their body language. Effective persuasion results in changing people's attitudes and associated behaviours so that the goals and objectives of the actual act of persuading are achieved successfully. Good persuaders are able to share their thoughts and ideas with others in such a way that they see the benefits for changing their attitudes or behaviours as they can see the benefits for doing so. People need to see why it is to their advantage to do something they, for example, did not want to do. It is important to consider the wants and needs to people before engaging in any kind of persuading. Good preparation is the key to effective persuading. It is important to consider, in the context of this research, that attitude is paramount to being emotionally healthy and thus being able to influence others in a constructive, positive and effective way. It appears that attitude is the driving force behind, for example, being truthful, developing trust with others and giving consent. Someone with a positive attitude towards others is more likely to influence the relationship with that person. Attitudes affect behaviours. Behaviours are overt and can be observed. This is an important point in influencing someone. The right attitude can make all the difference. It provides a good starting point for managers to develop appropriate behaviours that lead to genuine influencing/persuading approaches. The result will be a much longer-lasting successful influencing as it will be done for the right reasons and intentions.



The level of commitment by those being influenced will be much higher and stronger provided that the influencer shows no bad intentions. The outcome of the literature review confirms that a shortfall exists between what used to be considered appropriate managing people skills managers applied in the past and what managing people skills managers need to have and apply in future to meet the constantly changing demands placed upon them to achieve better results at work. The literature review has made a considerable contribution to this current research to establish that this shortfall exists. The three hypotheses of this research are supported by strength of evidence from the literature review, face to face interviews and the focus group meeting (see Table 5 for a summary of the results), namely:

H1: Managers with highly developed influencing skills are more likely to succeed in the new and increasingly challenging work environments. This hypothesis holds true. Greater emphasis will be needed to train managers and leaders in influencing and persuading skills.

H2: Attitude, Behaviour and Competence are the driving forces behind effective influencing. This premise is valid. More emphasis needs to be placed by organisations on the importance of influencing/persuading skills. They need to invest in the development of managers so these can become superior performing managers.

H3: Empathy and sincerity are the building blocks of persuasion. This is a valid hypothesis. Understanding how others think, feel and act is paramount to successful influencing/persuading. Managers must apply an open and honest approach. This will increase the likelihood that others will be genuinely committed, too.

Table 5. Hypotheses and Research Questions: Summary of Results

| Hypothesis                                                                                                                                 | Related Research Question(s)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Results                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| H1: Managers with highly developed influencing skills are more likely to succeed in the new and increasingly challenging work environments | <p>1. What existing and new influencing skills have developed over the years that can be considered appropriate for managers to adopt now to become more effective people managers in the new working environments?</p> <p>3. What makes an effective manager who is good at influencing people?</p> | <p>The evaluation of the literature was positive but not conclusive to determine the practical applications of the influencing and persuasion skills set. The face to face interviews and focus group meeting concluded that managers who adopt and apply the considered influencing and persuasion skills set will make superior contributions to increase productivity at work and will help to grow the business of the company they work for.</p> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 4. How can the contributions to knowledge from this research be practically applied in work situations globally?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| H2: Attitude, Behaviour and Competence are the driving forces behind effective influencing. This premise is valid. More emphasis needs to be placed by organisations on the importance of influencing/persuading skills. They need to invest in the development of managers so these can become superior performing managers. | 2. Does a potential shortcoming exist between the influencing skills managers used to have to manage people at work effectively, and the influencing skills they need to have now to manage people at work more effectively, to meet the stretching and challenging demands placed upon them by their companies and the working environments and practices?<br><br>3. What makes an effective manager who is good at influencing people? | The literature was not positively conclusive and did not provide sufficient valid and reliable evidence that suggests that knowledge and experience of attitudes and behaviours act as enablers for managers to increase the performance levels of their staff at work through appropriate influencing and persuading. The outputs from the face to face interviews and the focus group meeting closed this gap. |
| H3: Empathy and sincerity are the building blocks of persuasion. This is a valid hypothesis. Understanding how others think, feel and act is paramount to successful influencing/persuading. Managers must apply an open and honest approach. This will increase the likelihood that others will be genuinely committed, too. | 3. What makes an effective manager who is good at influencing people?<br>4. How can the contributions to knowledge from this research be practically applied in work situations globally?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | The literature is positively conclusive that managers with influencing and persuasion skills are more likely to become superior performers and get the most out of their people. It is also highly likely that managers with effective influencing and persuasion skills will make major contributions to help organizations realise their strategic intents, for example, to grow the business.                 |

## 5. Conclusions

There is conclusive evidence from the literature review, face to face interviews and a focus group meeting that influencing and persuasion, can improve the managing people skills of managers. Managers need to invest more of their time to influence themselves to follow through some of the ideas they may have developed to improve, for example, their own efficiency at work. This is a solid foundation for strengthening their ability to influence or persuade others. A genuine and authentic approach to the concept of influencing is essential. Managers must not misuse others by, for example, using them as a means to an end. This is short lived and will result in failure to establish more effective rapport with others. They need to treat people as an end in itself. Selling people the benefits, for example, why they should change, is an appropriate approach. Managers cannot change people's attitudes and behaviours but they can influence them so that people change their attitudes and behaviours because they can see the benefits for doing so. Managers need to share with others what it feels like to be part of and work in a highly successful team so that team members adopt the behaviours that are associated with success. They need to influence team members to unblock the values and beliefs these people hold so they can help them to develop their skills and produce improved performance levels at work. In real terms this would mean to take on more responsibilities or to introduce their own suggestions for improving, for example, work processes. Managers need to discuss with team members the characteristics that are sometimes helpful and sometimes hindering to help others to stop thinking small. It is important in today's working environments that team members consider the bigger picture and direct their efforts towards making significant contributions towards achieving, for example, the corporate goals of the organisation they work for. In addition, managers need to understand which buttons to push in people or what makes them tick so they can influence others more effectively to generate desired responses. The research was limited to a relatively small number of students from the Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Universidad de Oriente in Santiago de Cuba. Insights and subject matter knowledge from a larger sample of students and practitioners of other Universities, including those in other countries, would have provided richer and diverse research data to address the research scope in more depth and universally. It is confirmed that the research scope from Section 1.4 has been answered and that all three hypotheses hold true and are valid in the context of this research.

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