Organizational Leadership: MMI 481

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Journal 3: Influence

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## Influence, one component of organizational leadership, is the crux of everything we have learned throughout this course. By definition influence is the power to produce effects on another’s actions, behaviors, and opinions. This course has allowed me to develop my understanding of behaviors and the effects of changing behaviors. The idea of influence requires that I put that understanding into practice in order to achieve a desired outcome.

**What were your key learning’s from this module?**

Influence is used on each of us in our everyday lives when we make purchases such as cell phones, cars or maybe a home. Sales personnel use techniques to influence what we buy for their financial benefit. It is also used in the world of business with healthcare in the forefront. Healthcare took center stage in the public eye due to the growing expense of care and insurance, and the concern for quality and safety. Similar to buying a car or cell phone, through extensive growth of the internet and public reporting of healthcare data, the public has the ability to shop for healthcare. Review of public information, which includes customer ratings, as well as information on outcomes has an impact on decisions I make as a consumer. This information can therefore be considered an Influence.

I use this example to illustrate influence: Consider the purchase of a cell phone, car, or other big-ticket item, and the sales person with whom you are working. I believe a person who is successful in a sales career is an example of how influence comes naturally to some people. Based on conversation, the sales person is able to determine your knowledge of the item, and can use this to influence not only what product you buy, but also whether you purchase anything at all. I can apply this to my own recent cell phone purchase. The phone I recently purchased after discussing my options with the sales person has functions I still have not used. I had an influential sales person who encouraged my beliefs that I needed to purchase a phone with all the bells and whistles.

In my career in healthcare, my role was not as leader but as decision maker. Regardless of the role, it reinforced the idea that leaders fall into decision-making categories. These categories include Charismatic’s, Thinkers, Skeptics, Followers, and Controllers. Understanding the characteristics of which categories the leader or decision maker belongs is crucial when approaching a leader to discuss decisions. The characteristics of the leader as defined by the categories above will determine the level of information required to persuade a decision in your favor. Understanding their characteristics also allows you to identify the best manner to present information and a timeline for decision-making. Most importantly, you are able to anticipate the needs of the decision maker or leader. In the instance of my cell phone purchase, the salesperson was able to anticipate and present the information in a manner that would result in my decision to buy. In the case of healthcare, although there is not direct contact with the leaders of the organization, the information obtained affects my decision on where I will receive medical care.

The concept of framing comes to mind when I reflect on my personal work experiences. Framing is the idea that decisions may be influenced based on the manner in which the problem is worded or framed. This concept plays on the emotions and background of the decision maker. In other words, problems should be stated using verbiage that touches on issues of greatest concern. The example that exemplifies this clearest in the reading was that of nuclear arms and the refocus from the damage they may cause to who has access. In the example above of reviewing healthcare data, I would use the information to ensure I avoid a hospital with high mortality or complications rates.

Finally, I will mention the concept of power and the effect on influence and leadership. I will discuss this further in my discussion on confirmed beliefs as well as areas of disagreement.

**What beliefs and understandings were confirmed?**

One belief that was confirmed for me was stated in Cialdini’s article, *Harnessing the Science of Persuasion*. Cialdini confirms having the ability to persuade people is a gift. I also believe there are characteristics about the leader that have a direct impact on an employee being able to be persuaded or led. One factor is how you view the individual as a leader. From your perspective and experience, is the person knowledgeable and believable? Do you share the same believes and values? Do you respect the decisions of your manager/leader? Do you feel the decisions are logical and take into account the best interest of all involved? These questions tie into the six principles of persuasion; Principles of Linking, Reciprocity, Social Proof, Consistency, Authority, and Scarcity.

As I alluded to in the previous section, the concept of power and the role it plays in influencing was confirmed. The readings offered detailed explanation about individual power, which was defined as encompassing personal attributes, organizational and social position, and relationships. Additional explanations were provided on utilizing power to influence along with successful tactics. Although this was a confirmed belief, I also have some disagreement with the idea of power and leadership.

A question that was posed to each of us during the course was who influenced us professionally. After serious thought and consideration, it became apparent that I have been most influenced by negative experiences with leaders. This became a shared response confirming that negative experiences have a profound impact shaping each of us as future leaders. It is negative experiences we want to avoid recreating therefore we use the experience to shape us as leaders.

People with the natural skill set to persuade others are frequently not considered the best teachers of those skills. As I considered this idea, I thought about coworkers and friends that possess a strong skill set in various areas and the times I was expected to learn from them. I believe that the skill or characteristic needed to be successful were best compared to being a part of their personality. Everyone’s personality is different and it is not something you teach. Simply put, a person’s ability to persuade is not equal to a person’s ability to teach.

**What theories or practices did you disagree with?**

I was not able to identify a theory that I disagree with but I feel leadership style is the most critical concept affecting a leader’s ability to influence. Leaders can be authoritarian or autocratic democratic or delegative. I believe the style in which they choose to lead impacts the response they receive from those they are leading as well as their decision-making. For example, suppose you are a “seasoned” employee working for a leader with an authoritarian management style. Given your years of experience, you are likely independent and have ideas based on experiences. Authoritarians, also known as dictators, not only tell you what to do but also how to do it. This could lead to some resistance and conflict resulting in negative outcomes for both the leader and to follower. This resistance comes from the demanding style without appropriate communication and inclusion of an employee in decisions. The result is the employee may comply due to fear but does not “buy into” change or influenced by the leader.

One other area that I will address briefly is the concept of power. I have experienced managers in the past that talk about the power they have. I think because power implies strength and control, in my mind it ties to an authoritarian leadership style which in not my preferred style therefore leaving a negative impression.

**What are your personal strengths and challenges in this area?**

As I stated in my past journals, my personal strengths can often be my challenges. When we talk about influence, I would like to think I have the ability to evaluate a situation and make informed decisions. This correlates back to my tendency toward analytical thinking. I understand my limitations in given situations and can identify when I am in need of assistance. These traits can offer challenges to the leader in attempting to influence my decisions. This is not to say I cannot be influenced, but I would need to be assured that ideas, changes or decisions are ethical, logical and in the best of interest of the team or project.

Another concept that offers me challenge is the idea of power. I understand that it is through leadership power that results in achievement, positive outcomes, and evolutionary progress. I think because power is an intense word it takes a negative connotation in my mind being associated with a dictator form of management. Since this is not my preferred style of management, hearing the term in reference to leadership takes a negative spin. I have not experienced negative consequences from a leader because I keeping feelings internalized but it does result in frustration and dissatisfaction with my job.

I believe the key to overcoming any challenge is to educate yourself on the topic. Once the concepts of power and influence are understood in relation to leadership theory, I will be more accepting of the term. I understand where there are correlations and divisions and therefore will be able to disassociate from the negative connotation. Once dissociation of the negative association occurs, a more open line of communication occurs resulting in greater ability to be influenced.

**What key concepts and/or tools will you apply and how?**

I believe applying the concepts and theories learned in this module will be of great benefit in my personal and professional life. In my current position as Research Lead/Project Manager, responsibilities include running meetings and making suggestions for the addition of research as well as modification of current research. Through my experiences to date with team members, am able to identify their decision making style. This affords me the opportunity to take advantage of my ability to influence their decision based on being prepared to offer information in a manner that they respond to best. I can also present information offering a response time that is in keeping with their style, which should result in mutual respect for me as leader and them as decision makers.

An example how the learning’s on influence would have been beneficial. My team participated in a meeting a few weeks ago with a clear purpose of establishing guidelines for a study. I found one individual in the group to be particularly challenging. Regardless of suggestions or ideas, her first words were “we cannot do that.” It became clear the leader had a challenge on her hands. I believe by utilizing techniques in this module such as reframing, this may have been avoided. Ideas should have been restated to areas of greater impact to that employee. Additionally, if the leader took her decision making style into account, the success of influencing acceptance of the ideas may have resulted in positive outcomes. The result, because of the skepticism from this key employee, the meeting ended inconclusively with a request for additional information from our skeptic.

The other principle that will provide greater insight is power on influence. I have a clearer understanding on the meaning of “power” which although still seems a strong word, is not meant as negative. In the past, when I heard someone had power, it was a turn off and therefore I do not believe I heard anything beyond that point. Now, when I hear the term used, I will be able to move beyond a word and focus on the information or detail required to make decisions