

Positive Influence: Earning Support for BC Program Development

***DON SARACCO, Ed.D., EVP & COO
MLC & ASSOCIATES, INC.***

Introduction

Most BC practitioners will find themselves at some time in their careers wishing that they had better management support for their work. They know how important it is and can't understand what makes it so hard for others to see the value in protecting the business. Because this is such a common experience, it might be that it is inevitable, but that is doubtful. It may seem inevitable because it is not an experience unique to BC Program Developers. Most people who have served in a staff position in an organization have had a like experience at some time. The point is that the best practitioners recognize this reality, deal with it and get the job done anyway.

It is about politics and politics are an artifact of culture. The nature of humans and their organizations makes it necessary for all of us who would do work inside organizations to work within a political framework bounded by a culture. Some of the difficulty grows out of the fact that most of us look upon political processes with a jaundiced eye. We are suspicious of those who are politically skilled and generally envy them their skill at the same time. The good news is that much of what needs to be known in order to be successful in the political real world of winning support for your work can be learned. Some of it is a matter of character and for adults that is very hard to learn, but we will assume that the necessary strength of character is already in place and concern ourselves with strategies for building positive relationships in a political environment without compromising ethics or values. Because this has been such a common experience some smart people have given it a good deal of thought and we can learn from their work and experience.

In this paper, we will look at the organizational issues that help to create the difficulty that staff people experience. Among these is the distribution and use of power. We will then review a model that should provide a foundation for building influence with others. Last we will consider some specific strategies for building allies and winning support for program development.

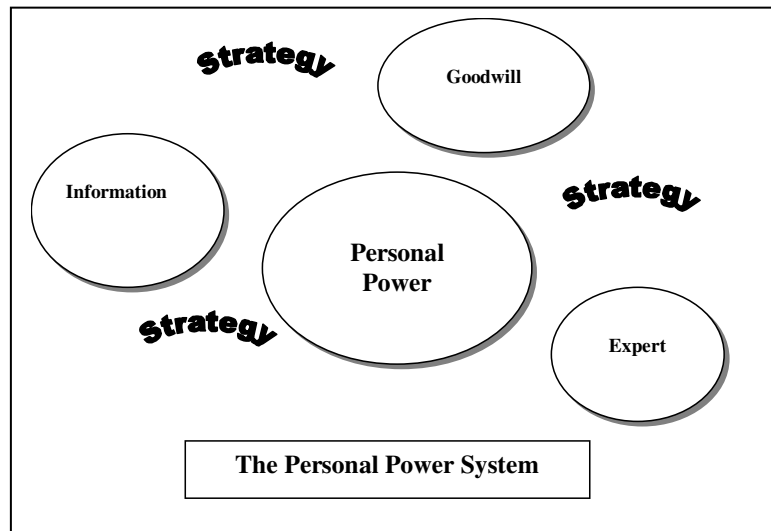
The Issues

The first issue is the reality of culture and the need for permission. Organizational cultures consist, in part, of normative expectations and behaviors. Some cultures require that most people do nothing without getting permission from competent authority. Others require permission only in some circumstance, such as for large expenditures or actions that will affect core business processes or significant numbers of people. In some cultures people are proud that one does not need permission, but may need forgiveness and that the latter can be fairly easy to come by when actions taken result in positive outcomes for the organization. Regardless of the specific types of norms in place permission is always an issue.

BC Program Developers need permission to gain access to information in most organizations. The instances where all information in an organization is open to anyone are extremely rare and not likely to proliferate quickly. Developers often need people in various parts of the organization to perform tasks or attend meetings or review data. All of these things require that permission be gained to use the personal resources (time and energy) of these people. The tasks and the meetings are in addition to one's primary job and may be viewed as unpaid work. It is usually hard to get people to do unpaid work. Most people seem to need there to be something in it for them in order for them to find the motivation to do something extra. As a Developer, you may need permission to even approach some people about extra work let alone ask them to do it or, heaven forbid, assign a task to someone. Another area where permission becomes important is in the allocation of resources to the program. Mitigation and preparation usually cost money. There may be a need to develop a facility for use as an EOC location. There will be a need for emergency supplies. Every evacuation drill will require that people leave their work for a time. Training that ensures the readiness of key personnel creates an additional draw on resources and can be seen as a distraction from more immediately necessary work. How can a developer get these things done? A common view of politics says that this is an issue of power and that permission flows from power.

Power has been described as the extent to which a person can influence others in accordance with his own intentions. There are two different dimensions of power that have been accepted by scholars as descriptive of the various abilities to influence others. They are Personal Power and Position Power. Within these are six sub-dimensions. John French and Bertram Raven laid the foundation research for this model during the middle of the last century. They

hypothesized that Personal Power included Information Power based on facts or reasoning that the person possesses and is able to share convincingly with others; Expert Power based on superior judgment or knowledge on some topics (different from Information in that it does not involve sharing with others); and Goodwill based on

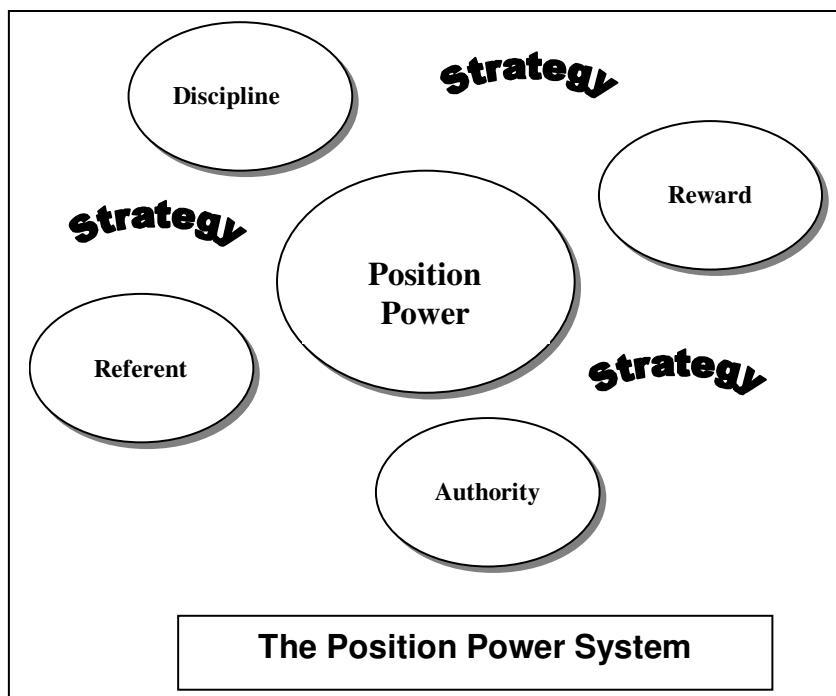


feelings of support or liking which the person has built with others. Information Power enables others to make better decisions and perform better. Expert Power is often based on a track record of success such that others are willing to accept advice and direction from the successful person. Goodwill Power encourages cooperation and willingness to support.

Information Power is useful when informed problem solving is necessary or when an understanding of rationale for a decision or action will help others to feel more positively about something. Using Information Power calls for strong communication skills, as people are not likely to have confidence in faulty logic or weak analogy or poor delivery. Information Power also requires sufficient time to fully develop ideas through various means of communication. While the communication may employ different media, face-to-face methods are an extremely important part of wielding this sort of power. This is particularly true when communicating with others who are stingy with the time they will allow for communication on topics that are not perceived as central to their personal goals.

Expert Power is useful when others need to have confidence that a course of action is the right one or when time is short or when confidential information cannot be divulged. Expert Power must be used when a person's credibility is dependent upon it. Regardless of what a person knows from formal study of a topic, those who possess the track record of success in the trenches will always be more able to convince others regarding the wisdom of a course of action or decision. Expert Power is also helpful when others must quickly trust your motives and objectivity on an issue.

Goodwill Power is useful when it is important to maintain harmony or low levels of conflict. Some people are attracted to work situations where friendship and close affiliations are part of the system. Goodwill will be useful with such people, especially if you need favors or special considerations from them. In order to use Goodwill Power others must find you likable, admirable or attractive in some way. Your actions must not generate a perception of disagreement with the basic values or ethics that guide others' actions. Good will Power cannot be used where it is desirable to be seen as interested in "strictly business" and impersonal relations. You must be seen as actively concerned with the personal welfare of those whom you would influence.



Position Power may be further broken down into Authority Power based on a formal right to direct others in certain matters; Reward Power based on control over things that others desire; and Discipline Power based on the ability to punish for failure to comply. Each of these also has a place and time appropriate to its use.

Authority Power is often a primary resource in organizations with highly formal structures, strict rules and established procedures. It is also the path to the most rapid response and compliance. It is useful when compliance is more important than learning or understanding. Of course it may be useful when you desire to maintain an impersonal, formal and business-like relationship with others. It requires that those whom you would influence must recognize your authority as legitimate. Any direction that you give must be seen as falling within the scope of your authority.

Reward Power can be useful when you believe that people need an extra incentive to become willing to support your work or do what they are asked to do. It has value when you want to encourage others to repeat supportive behaviors and when you want to steer behavior in

a certain direction such as toward ongoing support of training. The use of Reward Power of course requires that you have the ability to give others things that they value. Others must be able to do what you ask of them and you must be able to reward them soon after they have done what you have asked. Rewards, like accounts receivable, lose value as time passes.

Discipline Power is normally associated only with power over subordinates of some sort. We are rarely able to deliver punishment to peers or superiors in organizations. It is also true that discipline power is used in the event of a failure to comply with legitimate authority in the form of a directive or established rule, law or procedure. The use of Discipline Power depends upon the person being threatened with punishment not being able to retaliate in any meaningful way. It also depends upon the unimportance of the opinion of others regarding the extent to which the punishment was deserved. Gratuitous punishment will probably be seen as the act of a bully and undermine ability to influence over time. Discipline Power may be the ultimate in Position Power as it virtually always flows from legitimate status and authority in an organizational setting.

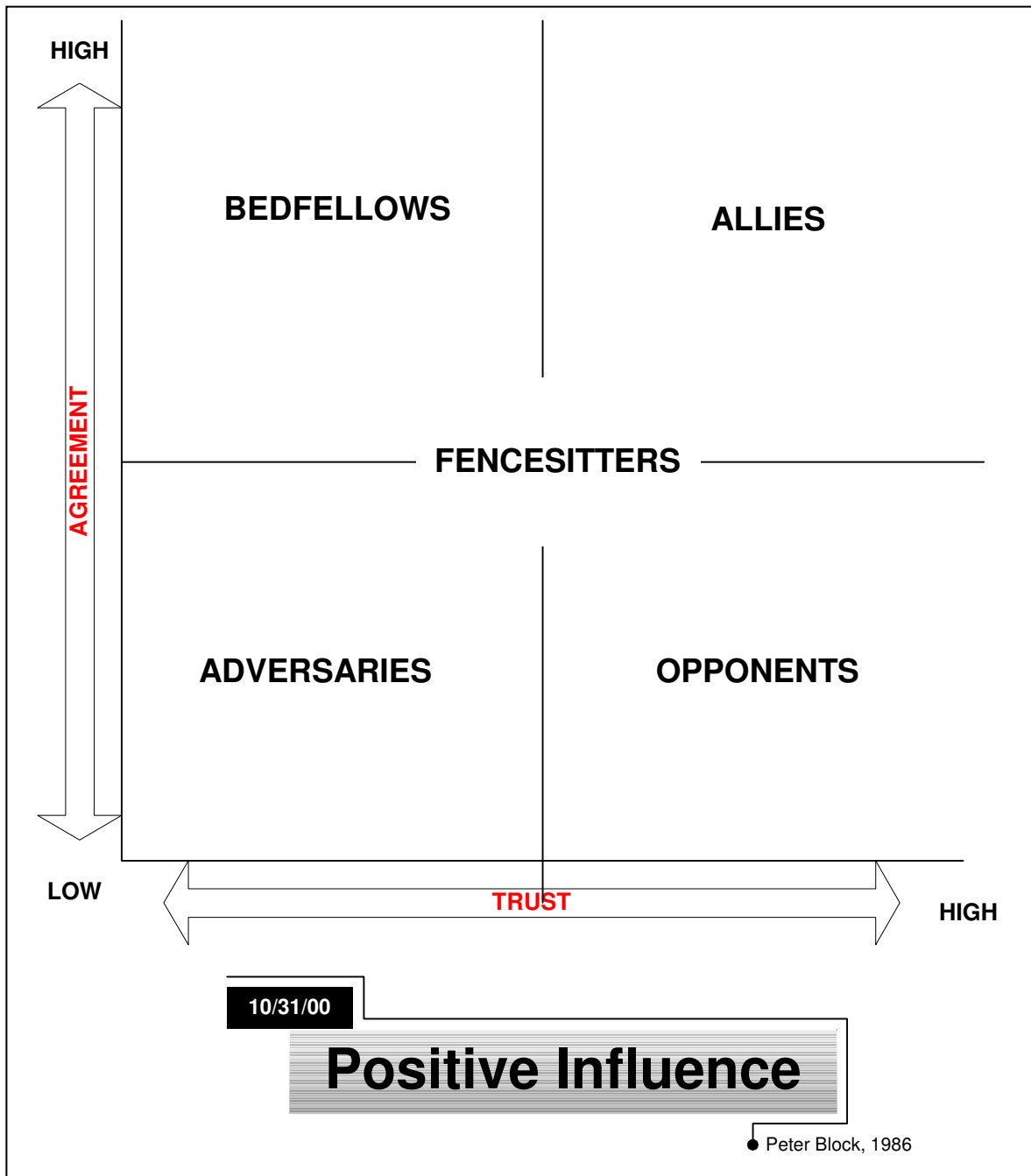
BC Program Developers do not normally have much position power. They are seldom senior executives and do not often have the ear of the most senior people in the company. This lack of position power is often how Developers define the problem of weak support. They can't get cooperation to get planning accomplished because they don't have the power to issue directives that must be obeyed. If this were the root cause of the problem, then the solution would be to do one of two things. One must either gain senior status in the organization or get some "air cover" from a senior executive who can and will issue the necessary directives to get tasks accomplished or resources allocated. Air cover is a kind of Position Power. It has been called "Referent Power" as it is based in the ability to refer to one who has legitimate status and authority as a supporter and ally. If you have Referent Power you can invoke the legitimate power of another in order to influence others. Referent Power can be a strong tool in exercising influence, but it must be used very carefully. We are all aware of people who "drop names" in order to influence others, but have no credibility because their ability to actually call on the power of the referent is lacking. Attempts to use Referent Power when it does not exist can ruin a reputation and render a Developer unable to perform.

When the support of senior managers can be authentically enlisted, it should be used sparingly and only to establish policy. Practices must be developed with those whose behavior is

necessary to carry them out. In the end, Position Power, whether direct or by referent, will seldom be useful to a BC Program Developer. It is more important to develop authentic relationships with others whose cooperation is necessary for program success. Let's look at another approach that should be more useful in your political struggles.

How Influence Works

Peter Block is a consultant and author who is best known for his books on consulting and leadership. In 1986 he presented an unpublished paper at a conference in Southern California where he presented a model for understanding influence in organizations. The diagram below describes that model.



Block said that there were two dimensions of relationship that are important to building influence. He argued that the extent to which two people agree on a vision of how things should be and the extent to which there is trust between them can be used to define roles in organizational relationships. Agreement on a vision does not need to be explicit. It can be fairly

general since a vision is a broad view of a future that can be brought into being. Agreement may come on parts of the vision rather than all of it. There is no way to know exactly how much agreement constitutes a sufficient amount, but it seems safe to say that the same level of agreement that works to define group consensus can be used here -- we can both live with the vision comfortably if it is realized and are willing to work toward it.

Trust can be defined as the positive expectation that another will not act opportunistically. In order to have this expectation of another, they must exhibit integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty and a measure of openness. Even here there are different types. There appears to be a type of trust based in deterrence where people can be depended upon because they have a fear of reprisal if the trust is violated. One could argue that trust in a vengeful god is this sort of trust. There is also knowledge-based trust that grows out of long experience with another such that certainty about how they will behave can be inferred from past behavior. Another type of trust can be based in emotional connection as a result of common identification with some deep value or principle.

Where there is high agreement and high trust between people, they can be allies in moving toward that vision. We might think of people who agree that the organization should strive for excellence in quality and customer service as allies in trying to achieve those ends if they also trust one another. When agreement is high and trust is low bedfellows emerge who remind us of members of different political parties who cosponsor legislation that serves both their constituencies. Where there is low agreement and low trust people become adversaries who contend over the means as well as the ends. Where trust is high and agreement is low opponents emerge who can comfortably follow rules of engagement since there is seldom fear of unethical behavior. Where there is insufficient knowledge about where someone stands with regard to agreement or trust, Block called him or her a "fence sitter." Most of these will join another category as soon as sufficient knowledge of where they stand can be revealed. In some rare cases there are people who care nothing for vision and trust no one under any circumstances. These folks lie in the "zone of indifference" and can be fence sitters forever. The good news is that they will not, by direct action, be obstacles to your work. They may, though, become obstacles by passive resistance to influence.

According to Block, the goal of influence building is to develop allies for it is allies who will be willing to support your work and to give you permission to use their resources and be a part of their organizational lives. Allies inhabit your sphere of influence. While bedfellows and even opponents can be helpful in certain circumstances, it is allies who represent the core of your ability to do the right things right.

Developing Allies

The first step in developing allies is to identify all of the people in your organization that you want on your side or from whom you want support. Perform a preliminary assessment of the extent to which you have agreement and trust with each person so that you can place him or her in one of the five categories in Block's model. The assessment may call for face-to-face meetings and frank discussion. This will help to shape your initial strategy.

Next, specify an action strategy for each category and person. Here are some general suggestions.

Change Your Adversaries and Opponents into Allies

- Make an honest appraisal of the extent to which your attitudes and behavior have contributed to the lack of agreement or trust. Have you been unwilling to listen to different points of view? Have you behaved in a way that is inimical with trustworthiness? Have you been unwilling to really listen to others whose ideas or associates are different from yours? Your answers to these and other questions about your role in the relationship can reveal how you have been a part of the problem and may reveal a path to the solution.
- State your vision of the desirable future clearly and truthfully. If your future includes a requirement that others change, be open about the fact. People do not resist change so much as they resist being changed. If you are perceived to be in the process of attempting to manipulate, you will gain neither agreement nor trust. Tell your story in the most compelling fashion possible. Talk about the benefits and the costs so that you will hear your own position and can affirm your belief that it is the best future possible.
- Listen aggressively. There may be more agreement than you thought. It is often true that the act of disclosure can reveal the goodness in the ways that your adversaries and opponents think. You may find that you can alter your vision toward full agreement without losing any of the value that you believe existed in your original vision.

- Accept an impasse. You may have a deep value conflict with an adversary or opponent that cannot be made to go away. Good people can represent very different ideas and still coexist. If you can turn an adversary into an opponent, you will have achieved a great deal. If you are successful with most people and can make them allies, your opponents will at least trust you and find you difficult to challenge except on the merits of your vision. The merits of your vision must always be a legitimate challenge, as changing situations and circumstances should cause all of us to continually examine the viability of our visions.

Becoming Trustworthy

Ultimately, trust is about your behavior. Even if someone thinks that you are wrong about the future, you will be more successful if you are unassailable on ground of trustworthiness. If you would be sure that others would not act opportunistically, it is necessary that you do not. Say what you are going to do and then do it. Create a record of consistency in your behavior. Above all, do not attempt to manipulate. Trying to get others to do what you want them to do without fully disclosing why you want it will eventually be revealed as disingenuous manipulation. Acting in ways that build trustworthiness will serve to encourage bedfellows to become allies and adversaries to become opponents and perhaps even allies since your vision may become more acceptable if you are perceived as trustworthy.

Summary

Influence is necessary for gaining the organizational commitment necessary for building a strong business continuity program. You may never have the position power that will make your path smoother, but you can build the personal power that will allow you to be influential. Influence can be acquired by understanding the nature of the resistance you face and by addressing it directly. Your goal must be to gain agreement with a vision of the future for your organization and to become trustworthy in the eyes of those whose cooperation and support you need. Learn to tell your story well and to behave with the consistency that proves trustworthiness and you will be able, over time, to achieve your goals within any organizational system.