

Employing Soft Power as Part of Your Management Toolkit

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During my Management Skills course at Rider University, I focus on the specific skills that are necessary to perform successfully in a Management role. These skills include leading, communicating effectively, delegating, conflict and time management, and motivating others.

While all of these skills are essential for today's Managers to master, I would argue that learning how to influence and motivate others to achieve desired outcomes is the most important attribute in a Manager's toolkit.

What is meant by soft power?

Management Authors Richard Daft and Dorothy Marcic define soft power as "influence that is based upon building positive relationships and personal credibility." They believe Managers can utilize this power to "gain agreement for a new initiative, secure consensus for a change in strategy, or win concessions from a difficult vendor."

The two types of soft power that are generally recognized in the field of Management include the following:

- **Referent Power** – this is derived from a Manager's personality characteristics that command others' respect and admiration so that people desire to emulate or follow the Manager. Other terms used to describe referent power include charisma and likeability.
- **Expert Power** – this power results from a Manager's special knowledge or skill in a particular field. When a Manager possesses true expertise, people will follow his / her recommendations or direction because of the Manager's superior knowledge and credibility.

The advantage of using soft power in the workplace is that it does not rely on a formal position or title, but instead relies on interpersonal relationships and credibility. As a result, it has the ability to affect long-term changes in attitudes and behavior.

In contrast, hard power is a short-term approach that stems largely from a person's position of authority in the organization. While hard power (including coercion, legitimate power and reward) may be used in the workplace, it should be limited to those situations that may require quick action or compliance.

In summation, Derchat Keltner (a Social Psychologist) commented, "Coercive power forces people to do things, while soft power inspires them to accomplish objectives."

How can soft power be developed by Managers to influence and motivate others?

Soft power can be used in many ways to support the achievement of corporate and team goals or objectives. Since this approach is based upon establishing positive relationships and credibility, it may take time to develop and implement. Some of the key ways that soft power can be developed include the following:

- Attempting to understand other employees' views and interests by listening to what they have to say about important issues that impact the organization.
- Engaging with groups of people that you would not normally interact with so that business colleagues will know you and respect your ideas, opinions and recommendations.
- Becoming involved in corporate initiatives that span various departments or divisions in the firm in order to promote collaboration, partnership and cross-silo communication.
- Investing the time to gain knowledge and expertise by attending certification programs or completing coursework in your profession.
- Volunteering to sit on a panel discussion involving industry issues to showcase your expertise and enhance your credibility.
- Publishing an article in an industry publication or professional magazine that is widely distributed.
- Framing your requests in a way that supports the mission and values of your organization.
- Assembling and developing an alliance of people who support your objectives and who can implement your decisions and the direction you have for the organization.

What are the benefits of using soft power effectively?

Experts agree that utilizing soft power in any organization delivers numerous benefits. This is why the most effective Managers develop and implement soft power as part of their repertoire. Some of the benefits that accrue from regularly employing soft power are as follows:

- It has the ability to affect long-term changes in attitudes and behavior so that your staff are more apt to support corporate priorities and objectives.
- It increases the likelihood that various stakeholders in the organization will buy into the Manager's decisions and implementation plans.
- It strengthens the Team dynamic and boosts Team performance.
- It may help the Team achieve desired business results in a difficult environment where others have failed.
- It improves the reputation of the Manager as others notice his / her ability to execute on corporate initiatives.
- It enhances the ability of the Manager to accomplish career success as he / she aspires to a Leadership role in the organization.

In conclusion, the ability of a Manager to make use of soft power to achieve business results not only improves corporate performance, it elevates the profile of the Manager who masters this important skill. In light of the above, what steps will you take to develop your soft power and make it an important component of your Management toolkit?