



trust

Influencing Without Authority, Building Trust in Organizations

New talent is often brought onto projects to objectively, effectively, and efficiently solve existing problems. The outside knowledge and expertise new team members bring to the table is invaluable to a project, but that fresh and novel perspective can hamper even the best efforts to improve an organization. The nature of some companies where experts rotate between a variety of projects does not afford employees the luxury of tenured experience in any particular group, and at worst, the experts can be perceived as dubious outsiders. As fresh eyes to the organization, new team members must be able to work through these obstacles to effectively deliver a project and earn stakeholder satisfaction, respect, and repeat business.

The Problem

The lack of trust, proven track record, and experience with a new project are hurdles that anyone new to an organization faces. Onboarding new employees is one of the most time-consuming activities for a company, and studies show that when starting a new job, employees spend the first 3 months consuming value, contribute value within the next 3 months, and after 6 months, provide stable value^[1]. Some organizations cannot afford for new employees to operate on a similar timeline, and you often must be able to deliver on projects above and beyond expectations and within a specified timeframe. These constraints require that those new to a team be able to build rapport, make early and easy wins, and seek advice from a variety of people, all of which help employees influence without direct authority. This method of dealing with such constraints helps workers achieve the objectives of accelerating their transition to a new project or role, building trust with project stakeholders, and delivering value to an organization in a way that meets or surpasses expectations. Influencing without authority allows new team members to transform themselves from an unfamiliar outsider to a trusted value-add to the organization.

About Us

Kenny & Company is a management consulting firm offering Strategy, Operations and Technology services to our clients.

We exist because we love to do the work. After management consulting for 20+ years at some of the largest consulting companies globally, our partners realized that when it comes to consulting, bigger doesn't always mean better.

Instead, we've created a place where our ideas and opinions are grounded in experience, analysis and facts, leading to real problem solving and real solutions – a truly collaborative experience with our clients making their business our business.

We focus on getting the work done and prefer to let our work speak for itself. When we do speak, we don't talk about ourselves, but rather about what we do for our clients. We're proud of the strong character our entire team brings, the high intensity in which we thrive, and above all, doing great work.

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METHODOLOGY	BEHAVIOR	EXAMPLE	OUTCOME
Build Rapport	Informally, yet professionally engage colleagues	Invite peers and leaders to casual lunches or coffee breaks	Increases likeability, creates healthy working relationship, builds trust between parties
Make Early and Easy Wins	Take initiative to do useful "grunt work" that requires minimal instruction immediately when joining project	Quickly complete menial tasks that the team needs—whether or not it relates to the project—but does not have the time to do	Demonstrates record of success, builds credibility, increases likelihood of repeat business
Seek Advice from a Variety of People	Probe and inquire from different perspectives to check for understanding and care-about	If someone opposes your ideas, respectfully and privately ask them how they would solve the problem	Convert detractors to advocates, learn different approaches to solving problems, better understand organizational politics

Influencing without Authority Methodology

Build Rapport

The ability to build consensus is often cited as one of the most important traits in a leader. While consultants are often not formally leading a client group, they must be able to create advocates, engage change agents, and build consensus to lead the project to completion. Forging relationships is integral to meeting those requirements and necessary to effectively influence an organization.

Creating advocates serves as a key to relationship building. Establishing a relationship with the main stakeholder of the project early on is pivotal, but building rapport with colleagues throughout the project is just as important as it is likely to increase how favorably the greater company regards your work and provides resources to rely upon if obstacles arise^[2]. These advocates can also deepen your knowledge and expertise of the organization by providing invaluable opinions and tribal knowledge that they may not share with labor that simply does the job without taking the time to build relationships.

Building rapport must occur without distracting from the objective of the project, and it can happen in the most casual of ways. The adage “never eat lunch alone” rings

true when creating advocates. Inviting project stakeholders to lunch, coffee, or even an informal conversation maximizes important facetime without the pressure of an agenda-driven meeting. Colleagues may even be more honest in their opinions over a meal or beverage^[3]. I had a Director mention that they were relieved they could talk to me over lunch in a neutral, fairly private environment as opposed to a highly-charged meeting. Every minute spent on-site on a project is valuable, and engaging with the team in a positive setting is a wise use of non-billable time. Engendering trust in such a way increases the likelihood that project deliverables are met more favorably, ensures that there are those inside the organization who can advocate or act as change agents on your behalf, and encourages others to serve as a positive reference when developing other business.

Make Early and Easy Wins

Establishing a record of success early in a project is likely to ensure that the entirety of the engagement will go smoothly and that you will be requested for future projects and initiatives. When starting a new project, immediately discuss with the main stakeholder what is important to them, and figure out how to quickly get results in those

areas. Easy results are those that require little ramp-up time and meet stakeholder needs without detracting from the overall goal of the project. Achieving wins early establishes crucial credibility for an outsider coming in.

Starting a new engagement oftentimes presents unfamiliar scenarios and situations, and quick, obvious wins can be harder to come by. There was one project where my information was not in the IT system when I arrived. Getting me into the system would take several more days, and I did not have access to the confidential information required to directly tackle the project head-on. I had to figure out a way to contribute without creating a disruption, so I asked the Director how may I be the most useful without a computer or network access. The Director handed me a dog-eared stack of papers and said they would really appreciate me proofreading their 82-slide presentation. I gladly went through every slide, learned what I could with the information in front of me, and scrutinized line after line of tiny footnotes. It took me an entire day, and it was tedious—not the type of work that generated fanfare, but the Director said it was needed help that no one else had the time to do. The Director learned that they could rely on me from that early experience and subsequently relied on me to generate other presentations from scratch. Because I was willing to do the grunt work, I was able to add a bit of value on a day when otherwise I would not have accomplished much.

Consistent performance and constantly meeting goals—no matter how large or small—also serves as a vehicle of repetition, the latter of which is proven to increase certainty. Certainty is a tool of persuasion that can be used at all levels of the organization and has shown to increase people’s “willingness to promote, defend, and act” on ideas^[4]. Leaders throughout the organization are more likely to adopt your recommendations if they possess a degree of confidence and certainty about your prior work.

Seek Advice from a Variety of People

As previously addressed, building rapport with colleagues requires seeking advice from key stakeholders. But as an outsider new to a project, you may encounter a small handful of detractors or those who are unwilling to assist in meeting project goals, even if it is for the greater good of the organization. Rather than simply managing the differences of opinion, seeking the advice of those who may not be keen on your ideas is a powerful way to not only communicate through conflict, but it may also reveal blind spots that were left unaddressed when planning the


project^[5]. During one of my weekly project meetings, I sensed hesitation from an advisor in the room who had a reputation for being difficult, and their hesitation eventually turned into a flat out objection to my idea.

After the meeting, I approached the advisor one-on-one and asked them for advice on how they would solve the problem. When listening to the advisor, I learned that there was a scheduling issue that I had not previously considered. Not only did I walk away from the conversation learning how to best optimize the time of leaders in the organization, but I earned the trust and respect of the supposedly difficult advisor by seeking their advice. The advisor was able to subsequently influence others on my behalf just as effectively as colleagues with whom I had shared several lunches.

The Benefits

Most employees– and consultants especially–will often find themselves in situations where they must champion change, persuade others, and build consensus in environments where they do not have formal authority. Investing the time, planning, and practice of building rapport with colleagues, making easy and early wins, and seeking advice from a variety of people allows you to influence those who judge your performance and increases the likelihood of project success. In addition to the direct benefits, the ability to influence without authority creates a level of trust with others in the organization who can offer different perspectives, advocate on your behalf, and help generate follow-on business. Increasing your influence in organization also offers unmistakable advantages over other employees who may excel operationally but lack strong relationships and interpersonal savvy. The adoption of the methodology hones critical business soft skills, distinguishes personable and trusted talent from a saturated field, and ultimately, increases stakeholder satisfaction.

About the Authors



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Notes

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This article was first published on www.michaelskenny.com on December 7, 2015. The views and opinions expressed in this article are provided by Kenny & Company to provide general business information on a particular topic and do not constitute professional advice with respect to your business.

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Partner Led

Our Partners are personally committed to our clients and lead every engagement.

Experience, Perspective and Passion

We average over 20 years in professional services and bring tailored approaches to every client engagement.

Focused, Collaborative, High-Impact

We work side-by-side with our clients in highly focused teams to solve complex business problems.

Client First

Our highest priority is our client's professional and personal success. We believe clients should expect more.

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