Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru
Welsh Local Government Association

Influencing Skills

Councillors workbook

Updated March 2022

Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils

We are The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA); a politically led cross-party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members.

We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

Our ultimate goal is to promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

We'll achieve our vision by

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
- Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
- Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils
- Promoting sector-led improvement
- Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
- Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce

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Foreword

This workbook has been designed as a learning aid for elected members. It makes no judgment about whether you have been a member for some time, or whether you have been elected more recently. Whatever your experience to date, the need to communicate with and influence other people is an essential task for any elected member. This workbook will help you to think about the ways in which you influence other people, the tactics you employ and the importance of being effective.

The workbook can be used as a stand-alone learning aid or as an adjunct to other material you may cover. It offers few firm rules for members as it is recognised that each individual must decide how best to use and develop their influencing skills, based on individual preference and confidence.
As such, the workbook should serve more as a direction marker rather than a road map.

In practical terms, the document will take between two to three hours to work through. You do not need to complete it all in one session and may prefer to work through the material at your own pace. The key requirement is to think about your own approach in influencing other people - how the material relates to your local situation, the people you serve and the council you represent.

Introduction

In working through the material contained in this workbook you will encounter a number of features designed to help you think about the way you use and develop your influencing skills.

These features are represented by the symbols shown below:

Guidance
This is used to indicate guidance, research, quotations, explanations and definitions that you may find helpful.

Challenges
These are questions or queries raised in the text which ask you to reflect on your role or approach – in essence, they are designed to be thought-provokers.

Case studies
These are 'pen pictures' of approaches used by councils elsewhere.

Hints and tips
These represent a selection of good practices which you may find useful.

Useful links
These are signposts to sources of further information, outside of the workbook, which may help with principles, processes, methods and approaches. A full list of useful additional information is set out in the Appendix of the workbook.

Influencing skills >
Influencing to get what you want

Your role as an elected member requires you to influence people just about all of the time. This may take the form of gaining support, inspiring others, persuading people to see your point of view or creating relationships. Whatever form it takes, being a good influencer will make your role easier and enable you to get what you want.

Paradoxically, the most effective way of improving your ability to influence others starts with yourself, and the interpersonal, presentation, communication and assertiveness skills you possess. In other words, learning to adapt your personal style when you become aware of the effect you are having on other people, while still being true to yourself. Behaviour and attitude change are what's important, not changing who you are or how you think and feel

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Influence:
'have effect upon... action of person upon another... person exercising power'
The Concise Oxford Dictionary

Your ability to influence

Think about your day to day role as an elected member.

Write down a list of the situations in which you need or want to influence other people:

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Now write down anything you find difficult about influencing people in those situations:

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The remaining sections of this workbook will consider how you influence other people and some of the approaches and tactics you can think about to improve your effectiveness.

The nature of influence >
Your interpersonal skills

Influencing is about understanding yourself and the effect or impact you have on others.
Though it can, on occasions, be one way, the primary relationship is two way, and it is often about
changing how others perceive you for the better. Within this, it is important to recognise that influencing
is about moving things forward without pushing, forcing or telling others what to do.

All too often, if you seek to influence people through bullying or coercion you will not succeed in
winning their support – and their lasting impression of you is likely to be negative.

Good influencers are likely to display a variety of personal characteristics, which can help to positively
influence other peoples' perceptions, e.g.:

- energy and enthusiasm.
- a calm, even tempered, disposition.
- an ability to be flexible and adaptable to different people and situations.
- strong listening and observation skills.
- an ability to act impartially or with neutrality.
- self-confidence and gravitas.
- demonstrable empathy and perception.

However, the key abilities for anyone seeking to influence others are the requirement for good
judgement and effective social and information skills.

Of course, the way that you approach people and the particular style you adopt in trying to
influence them can take a variety of forms, depending on your personal preferences and the
situation you find yourself in. Being a good influencer will require you to adapt your approach
depending on how directive you wish to be and whether you believe you should appeal to
people's emotions or intellect to achieve your desired result (see diagram). This is again about
judgement on your part. And while we use a variety of words to describe the different roles that
people adopt in influencing others, all can be useful and legitimate tactics for you to employ as
an elected member.

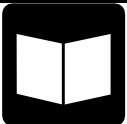**Influencing >
The Different Styles**
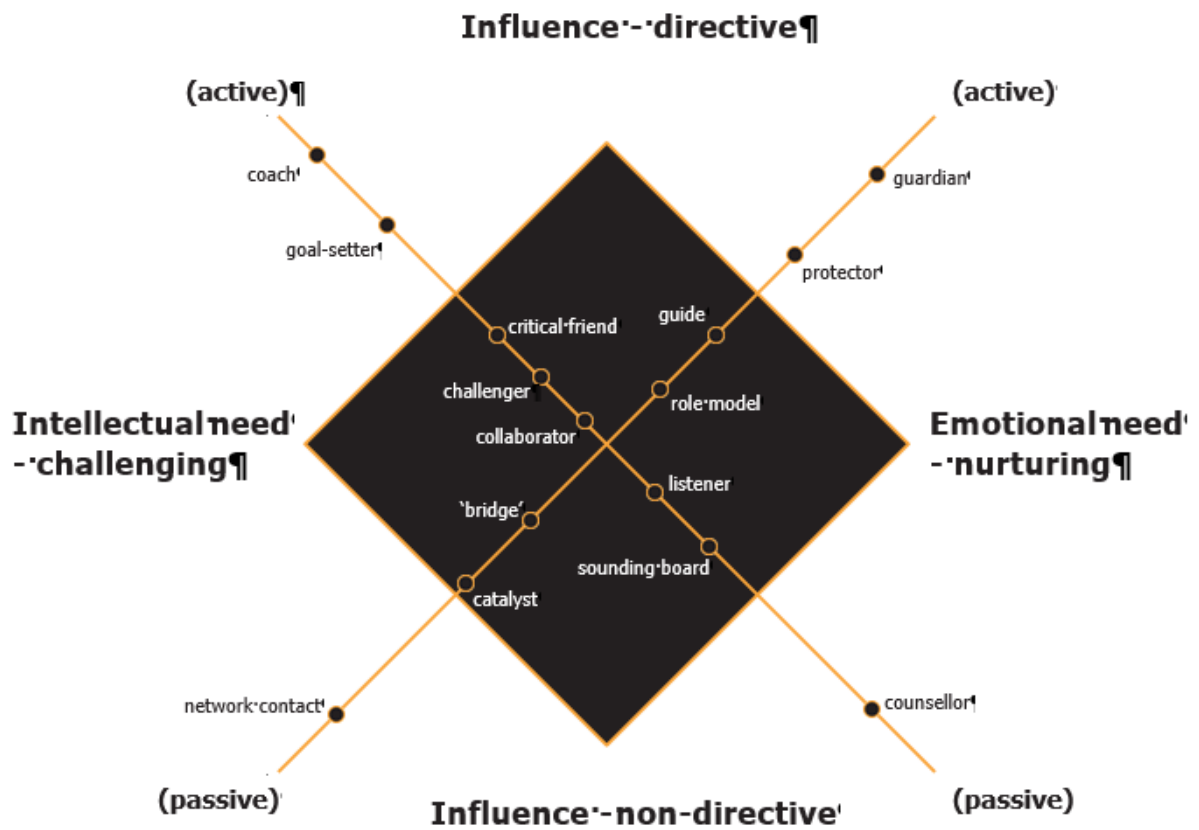
Influencing the people you deal with

Influencing - what it isn't:

- bullying
- coercing
- pushing

- dictating
- manipulating
- bludgeoning

- haranguing
- forcing

Key influencing skills

Social skills - the ability to interact successfully with other people in any given situation.

Information skills - the ability to have information relevant to the debate, knowing what the issue is but also understanding the context in which it occurs.

Judgement - an ability to assess all aspects of the information content and social skills experience in communicating with people.

Look again at the different 'influencing styles' shown in the diagram (p8)

Identify which named styles you might choose to adopt in the following circumstances:

You are running an advice surgery in your local library and have been approached by an irate, elderly woman who wants to complain about the council's waste collection service - all you want to do at this stage is convince her to calm down and give you the facts.

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You have taken on the task of helping a newly elected colleague to find his feet as a ward member. He has no previous experience of the role and you are looking to encourage him to follow your advice.

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You are at a community meeting discussing ways in which the council can help to promote social cohesion in your ward. The debate is lively and helpful, but you now wish to get agreement on the way forward.

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Building Rapport >
Influencing others in the way you present yourself

We have already indicated that influencing people requires you to think about how you come across to others.

The cliché about 'making a good first impression' has never been truer. It takes just a quick glance for someone to begin to evaluate you when you first meet. In those first few seconds, other people will form opinions based on your appearance - your body language, demeanour, mannerisms and the way you are dressed. While often superficial, these first impressions can have a lasting impact on your ability to influence other people.

Creating a good impression is about building trust and rapport. This is not easy when you are meeting people who you have either never met before or have met before, but do not know well. The following tactics can help:

- **present yourself appropriately** - your physical appearance says a lot about you, so think about what you wear and how others might perceive your overall look. This doesn't mean losing your individuality but spending time thinking about what is appropriate for the people and situation you are likely to face.

- **relax and be yourself** - help others to relax by demonstrating how at ease you are. Be confident and use your body language to project your self-assuredness, e.g. stand tall, smile, make good eye contact and greet people with a firm handshake.

- **be courteous and attentive** - most of us know that good manners and polite, attentive, behaviour contribute much to a good first impression. But don't let yourself down by forgetting to switch off your mobile telephone or dominating the early part of the conversation. Some early small talk can help to break the ice and remember the maxim - "I don't care what you know, until I know you care about me". In other words, if you want to influence people you have to build rapport with them first.

If this all sounds a bit daunting, it shouldn't. Just think how you react when you meet people who are seeking to influence your opinions or actions. The same rules apply. And while building trust and rapport is often about personal chemistry, remember that none of us can hope to influence all other people. As a rule of thumb, it is often suggested that some 30% of any given group are likely to be your type of people (what we might call 'your tribe'), with another 30% being people you are unlikely to build any effective rapport

with (your 'polar opposites'). The remaining 40% of the group could fall into either camp. On this basis, you have the potential to build good trust and rapport with up to 70% of any group you meet – that's more than enough for any vote-conscious member!
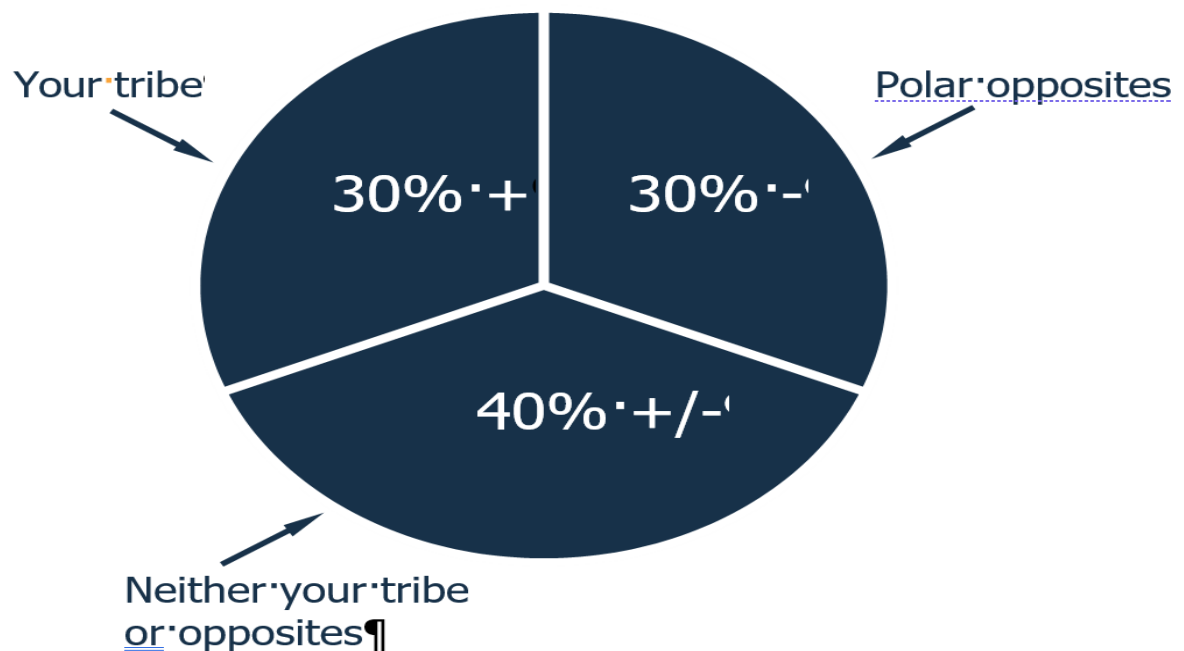

How the public see you

The IDeA commissioned research by the Work Psychology Partnership, into what makes an effective member.

It identified that members are most likely to gain the respect of their constituents if they are honest, trustworthy, accessible and competent.

Effective questioning

To prompt dialogue you need to use a range of techniques:

Closed questions - direct questions that require a one word answer, e.g. 'yes' or 'no'.

Open questions - the 'how', 'why' and 'what' type of questions that require a more expansive response.

Leading/limiting questions - questions designed to limit the range of possible answers, e.g. 'Is it true that…?'

Soft commands - prompts which sound like questions to elicit information, e.g. 'Perhaps you could explain…'

Paraphrasing/summarising - repeating what you have heard and asking for a confirmation of accuracy.

Having built some rapport, your next step is to prompt discussion with the person or people you are seeking to influence. This is primarily about creating the best conditions for others to engage in debate and come forward with their opinions and suggestions. Only through dialogue can you understand what people think and where they stand on any given subject. Crucially, if you are to win over doubters and detractors, this will also enable you to identify any perceived 'distance' between what you believe and the expressed views of others.

The two main ways of prompting discussion are to:

- **ask open and searching questions** – to probe, test and challenge others through effective questioning to enable you to get to the 'heart of the matter' under discussion.

- **listen actively** - to encourage people to speak through 'active listening', i.e. using nods, eye contact, silence, smiles and comments to prompt others to share their views.

The Accademi Wales ILM course on [Coaching and Mentoring](#) identifies 6 levels of listening and the effect they have on the people being listened to. Adopting the right listening style can be the difference when looking to influence people.

Ultimately, your objective is to win the 'hearts and minds' of the people you are seeking to influence, i.e. to convince them on both an emotional and intellectual level that the way forward you are proposing or endorsing is the best solution. Much of this will depend on your own communication skills and your ability to win over people in difficult group situations (both covered later).

However, it is also important to stress that people respond to arguments and information in different ways, depending on their personal preferences. As a result, a tactical appeal to someone's reason, affection, intuition or desire will often help to generate the support you are seeking, e.g. imagine trying to convince a disgruntled council tax payer about the case for funding a new leisure park – while a challenge to their sense of reason may generate only a lukewarm response, an affectionate appeal on the basis of the pursuits and interests they may have as a potential user of the park is more likely to convince them of the need for such an amenity.
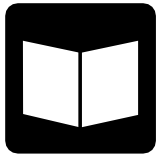
Listening habits that do not help to influence other people

Pseudo-listening - appearing attentive, perhaps even saying 'yes', while thinking about something else.

Turn-waiting - waiting for others to finish so that you can say what you think. As you plan your response, you aren't listening.

Selective listening - filtering out the bits you do not want to hear or do not agree with.

Defensive listening - looking for faults in other people's views or areas you can disagree with.

Insensitive listening - taking people's words at face value without trying to understand what is behind

Influencing 'hearts and minds'

reason >	mind/logic
affection >	heart
intuition >	gut feel/second sight
desire >	passion

Winning people's 'hearts and minds'

Imagine you are trying to influence people in the following situations. Having prompted some discussion, you are now trying to win over a few remaining doubters. What tactical appeals might you try to influence these people (i.e. reason, affection, intuition or desire):

a. You are seeking support for the grant funding of some new goalposts in a local park. You know your fellow ward members are keen sports fans.

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b. You are at a community meeting to promote a new council campaign to report racist incidents in local schools. You believe that most of those voicing concerns have an innate sense of 'fair play'

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c. You are arguing for the council to introduce a new scheme for the restoration of a well-loved local monument. Most objections are on the basis of the costs of the scheme.

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Influencing through communication - avoiding the pitfalls

Consider how, rather than influencing people in a positive way, the following might impact in a negative way on your reputation and that of the council:

a. You issue a press release supporting the council's introduction of a ban on the playing of conkers in local schools to prevent accidents to children.

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b. You give a television interview outlining why you believe that people should use their cars less and make greater use of public transport.

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Influencing to get your point across > The importance of effective communication

Much has been written about the importance of good communication in conveying ideas, direction, information and inspiration in local government.

It's about more than just facts and figures – effective communication can help local people to understand what their council is about, what it has achieved, the plans it has and the role individual members play.

Your personal success may also be heavily dependent on your ability to communicate – influencing people to get involved, turn out at elections, voice their satisfaction (or concerns), contribute to activities in the community and be better citizens. In effect, it's a chance for you to demonstrate your community leadership.

On the flip side, poor communication is a waste or your time and that of the people you are trying to influence. It may also be a waste of the council's limited financial resources, e.g. a badly judged leaflet, an expensive and ineffective consultation exercise, or a poorly advertised community meeting.

Poor communication risks alienating the very people you are trying to influence. Alongside the fact that you fail to achieve what you intended, you may be seriously damaging your long-term relationship with key people. There are risks from this to both the council (an erosion of it's corporate reputation) and to you personally (it could lose you votes).

The IDeA has produced some competencies for members known as the National Skills Framework. This contains some 'positive' and 'negative' indicators to guide your personal communications:

National Skills Framework- 'Communication Skills'

Positive indicators:

- Communicates regularly with community via newsletters, phone calls and local media
- Listens sensitively, checks for understanding and adapts style as necessary
- Builds relationships with local media and creates opportunities for communicating key decisions, activities and achievements
- Speaks clearly and confidently in public, uses accessible language and avoids jargon or 'council-speak'
- Provides regular feedback, keeps people informed and manages expectations
- Uses appropriate language to communicate key points verbally and in writing, e.g. letters, reports, interviews and presentations

Negative indicators:

- Interrupts, appears not to listen and uses inappropriate or insensitive language, e.g. shouting, being rude or abusive
- Communicates reactively and is slow to respond when approached by others, e.g. public, colleagues, officers or media
- Fails to listen to others' views and presents rigid and inflexible arguments
- Uses information dishonestly to discredit others and is unwilling or unable to deliver unpopular messages
- Fails to participate in meetings and lacks confidence speaking in public
- Presents subjective and confused arguments using poor language and style

In summary, there are four basic questions you need to consider in planning to influence people through any communications exercise:

- what do you want to achieve from the communication?
- who is your audience?
- what is your key message?
- what communication format is going to have the best impact?

In reality, you might plan to use more than one method of communication, but the same questions need to be considered each time.

Planning to influence people through communication

Outline how you would plan to influence people through communication in the scenario below:

The council has started a high-profile campaign to encourage people to minimise their domestic waste and reduce the amount of refuse being collected for recycling and disposal. You have decided to champion 'waste minimisation' in your ward to show what can be done and encourage greater efforts by everyone in the local community. On this basis:

a. What do you want to achieve from the communication?

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b. Who is your audience?

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c. What is your key message(s)?

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d. In what format are you going to communicate for the best impact?

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By far the most common and useful way of influencing people is through face to face communications, i.e. meetings, talks, conferences, advice surgeries etc. In earlier sections of the workbook we discussed the importance of creating a good impression, building rapport, generating discussion and winning 'hearts and minds'.

Other things you should consider, when planning to influence people through face to face communications, include:

- having a good 'opening' in any talk or meeting to grab the attention of the audience, e.g. using arresting statements, facts, anecdotes, quotations or rhetorical questions. Avoid the use of excuses, negative statements, excessive detail and clichés.

- having a structure to what you want to say, e.g. preparing and practising, focusing on the agenda required, sticking to time and following a logical sequence of key points. Avoid making it up, reading from a script, gabbling and going over your allotted time.

- using good content, e.g. clear visual aids, slides to display brief points/prompts and handouts of key information. Avoid excessive use of Powerpoint slides.

- maintaining the interest in what you are saying, e.g. speaking clearly, varying the tone of your voice, altering the speed of your delivery (not too slow or fast), smiling and maintaining eye contact with those listening. Avoid repeating yourself too often and watch the signals you give out through your body language, e.g. slouching, looking bored, yawning etc.

- responding positively to challenges and objections, e.g. actively listening (e.g. nodding and using "Mmm…", and "Yes" in response to questions), using questions to check your understanding of the objection being made (this sometimes heads off the challenge in itself) and politely signalling when you disagree (e.g. "As things stand…" and "What I would say is…"). Avoid saying, "Ah yes, but…" when challenged.

- finishing any meeting or presentation with an effective 'ending', e.g. voicing a conclusion, asking for a decision and summarising major points or next steps. Avoid finishing without a conclusion or ending with "I hope I have…"

Being assertive >
being influential in difficult group situations

Influencing people can sometimes be a difficult and demanding process. People respond in different, sometimes unpredictable, ways when others are trying to influence their thoughts and actions.

Arguments are common and conflict is not unusual. This is true enough in one-to-one situations but is particularly so in group situations. A number of psychologists have put forward theories of 'group dynamics' to try and explain this phenomenon. A basic appreciation of how 'group dynamics' works is useful in understanding the ways in which groups of people tend to behave when brought together on a shared task or activity. This can have a big impact on your ability to influence members of any newly formed group.
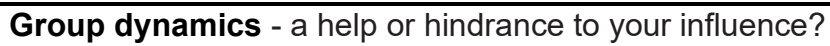
Michael Argyle, a social psychologist, set out his theory of 'group dynamics' in a 1969 book entitled, 'Social Interaction' (Tavistock Press). He observed that different groups of people tend to go through a similar lifecycle of stages in coming together, and interacting, to produce a team performance. His theory has been adopted by many psychologists, trainers and consultants since that time. In his theory, Michael Argyle categorised four distinct stages in the 'life' of a group: (see table overleaf).

1. Forming
2. Storming
3. Norming
4. Performing

Argyle's theory of 'group dynamics'

1. **forming** >the group comes together. People find out about each other, consider their objectives, discuss ideas and possible tasks and reflect on their own roles within the group. It is usually a very sociable time in the life of the group.

2. **storming** >as the group begins to settle, individuals get to know each other and may start competing for status and roles. Disagreements can occur and where some people may try to assert strong opinions or leadership tactics, others may withdraw. If tensions are not mutually dealt with at this stage, they tend to disrupt group communication and activity and, most importantly, mutual respect for the roles of participants. To reach stages (3) and (4), conflicts need to be resolved.

3. **norming** >after the more tense stage of 'storming', the group usually begins to settle as participants find a common approach to the task that all can agree on or accept (this is where unsettled conflicts can become a problem, as they tend to reoccur at this point). Action plans begin to emerge and people find space to begin working on tasks.

4. **performing** >this is the stage when the group achieves its optimum efficiency and the task is achieved.

Group dynamics - a help or hindrance to your influence?

Reflect on the four stages of group behaviour outlined above.

Does this sound like any meetings or group situations you have been in recently, where you tried to influence the views or actions of others? If so, how successful were you and how might an understanding of group dynamics help you to tackle the task differently another time?

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Recognising that people often behave differently in groups can help you, tactically, to be more effective in influencing others. Much of this is about watching and listening to group behaviour and exercising your own judgement about when to be assertive and intervene and when to sit back as discussions unfold and people exchange views or come into conflict.

Other approaches that can help you to be more influential in difficult group situations include:

- setting a positive tone and modelling the 'norms' for group interaction.

- being yourself, without defensiveness or hidden agendas, and sharing your experiences and feelings to establish empathy.

- describing what you see rather than being judgmental, e.g. "on the basis of what you've said, you don't look to be supportive…"

- being empathetic – showing you understand people's situation, needs and feelings, i.e. trying not to give advice, judgements or interpretations.

- maintaining your assertiveness, but avoiding displays of unnecessary emotion (weakness or aggression) and unhelpful behaviours, e.g. irritators (e.g. "I think what I've said is very reasonable"), immediate counter-attacks and talking over the top of people.

- keeping people and problems separate, i.e. recognise that in many cases other people are not just 'being difficult' – real and valid differences can lie behind conflicting positions. By separating the problem from the person, real issues can be debated without damaging working relationships.

- exploring options together, i.e. being open to the idea that a third position may exist and that you can get to this idea in collaboration with others.

- listening first and talking second – to stand any chance of influencing others you must first understand where other people are coming from before feeling you must 'defend' your own position.

- focusing on getting the support of the 'early adopters', i.e. there will usually be a proportion of people in any group who are open to new ideas or new ways of doing things. Their support can often be influential in encouraging the more resistant to come forward, over time, in support of your views or action plans.

Influencing in groups - things to consider

Who contributes the most and least to group discussions - are they aware of it and can you target their support?

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Who are the silent people - is their silence about dissent or fear and could your intervention bring them around to your point of view?

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Who appears to have the 'ear' of the prime movers and can you influence the latter by getting these on side?

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Who are the rebels, bullies, critics and scapegoats - can you employ different tactics to appeal to each?

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What is the atmosphere in the group - could you intervene to create more congenial conditions and win friends as a result?

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Have the discussions reached a sticking point - could you broker some discussions around negotiating, bargaining or compromising to move things forward?

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Who is tending to dominate - could you generate greater support by standing up to these individuals?

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A final word and next steps

Influencing other people is often more about changing your attitudes and behaviour than it is about changing theirs. Spending time thinking about your own approach and the interpersonal, presentation, communication and assertiveness skills you possess can help you to be more effective in influencing others and getting what you want. All politicians need to influence others – it is the very lifeblood of political debate and a cornerstone of our democracy. But it is also a skill that you need to hone and develop as an effective member.

Do you want to be a positive influence in the world?

First, get your own life in order. Ground yourself in the single principle so that your behaviour is wholesome and effective. If you do that, you will earn respect and be a powerful influence. Your behaviour influences others through a ripple effect. A ripple effect works because everyone influences everyone else. Powerful people are powerful influences.

John Heider,

Where do you go from here?

Look back over the material contained in earlier sections of this workbook and consider the following:
   a. What key action points can you identify to improve your influencing skills, i.e. what three or four things might you start doing, keep doing or stop doing?

1_____
2_____
3_____
4_____

   b. Have you identified any gaps in your knowledge or shortcomings in your other personal skills? If so, please set these out below and identify how any further training or development might help you, e.g. further reading/research, attending courses, coaching, mentoring, work shadowing etc.

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Appendix   **Sources of further information**

Printed publications

Social Interaction,
Argyle, M., Tavistock Press, 1969.

Useful websites

www.wlga.gov.uk
The website of the Welsh Local Government Association - invaluable information for all those in Local Government in Wales

The Welsh Language Board (welsh-language-board.org.uk)
Website of the Welsh Language Board who have a duty to advise organisations on the ways in which they can implement
the principle of language equality in the provision of services and use the Welsh language in their dealings with the public in Wales.

http://www.clearest.co.uk/
The Plain Language Commission can help you use plain-language principles to clarify your web and printed communications.

www.IDeA.member skills framework (moderngov.co.uk)
The Improvement and Development Agency has developed a useful tool to identify the key competencies for elected members- including communication skills and working in partnership which will help develop members influencing skills.

Academi Wales learning resource
http://www.Academi Wales (gov.wales) Becoming a thought leader-influencing decisions, behaviours and thoughts to achieve results through others.

Academi Wales learning resource
http://www.Academi Wales (gov.wales) Becoming a thought leader-influencing decisions, behaviours and thoughts to achieve results through others.