

THE INFLUENTIAL PROJECT MANAGER

Winning Over Team Members
and Stakeholders



ALFONSO BUCERO

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This book is dedicated to three different project influencers:

All upper managers, executives, and project managers who helped me directly or indirectly to make this project happen, contributing their opinions, experiences, and real practices.

To Taylor & Francis editors who sponsored me on this project, offering their commitment and support from the start to the end of this project.

To my wife, Rose, who always supported and encouraged me to get this project finished.

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Since 1992, Bucero has been a frequent speaker at international PMI Congresses, IPMA Congresses, and PMI SeminarsWorld. He has been a keynote speaker in several congresses worldwide. He delivers project management training and consulting services in several countries worldwide. As a “project management believer,” he defends passion, persistence, and patience as vital keys for project success. Bucero has been a professor for MEDIP (Master in Construction and Project Management) at the Universidad Politecnica since 2004, and he is a professor and executive consultant for the Marketing & Finance Business School in Bilbao (Spain).

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Bucero also coauthored with Randall L. Englund the books *The Complete Project Manager* and *The Complete Project Manager Toolkit* published by Management Concepts on March 2012, and published a new version of his book *Dirección de Proyectos, Una Nueva Vision*, and the book *Hoy Es un Buen Día* (Spanish translation of *Today Is a Good Day*). He has also contributed to professional magazines in the United States, Russia (SOVNET), India (ICFAI), Argentina, and Spain. Bucero was a contributing editor for six years for the “Crossing Borders” column of *PM Network* magazine, published by the PMI. He is a monthly contributor for the Project Connections Blog, and has published several project management articles in other magazines.

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Introduction

The first question that came to my mind when I decided to write this book was: Why write a book about influence? I believe influence is a key skill a project manager must develop. Over the years, I have managed different projects and without being conscious of it, I indirectly influenced many people through my behavior, actions, and decisions.

Persuading people to help meet project goals was a difficult task for me when I started as a project management practitioner. Some years later, I understood that everyone has influence on other people. It does not matter who you are or what your job is. You don't have to be in a high-profile job to be a person of influence. In fact, if your life in any way connects with other people, you can influence these people. Everything you do in your job, at home, and with your colleagues and friends has an impact on the lives of the people around you.

You, as a project manager, influence all your project stakeholders. In fact, if you want to be successful as a project manager or to make a positive impact on your projects, you need to become a person of influence. Without influence, there can be no success. For example, if you are a project manager your success depends on your ability to positively influence your team members. No matter what your professional or personal goals are in life, or what you want to accomplish, you can achieve them faster, you can be more effective, and the contri-

bution you make can last longer if you learn how to become a person of influence.

It is well known that many project managers do not have authority, but nevertheless they need to have influence to achieve project success. Influence is invisible because it is about how people think. We cannot see people's thoughts. Thoughts drive behavior, which drives actions and results. We can look at the results that influential project managers achieve but still have no idea about what makes them influential. Just as we cannot understand a person by looking at his/her shadow, we cannot understand influence by looking at its effect. We have to look for the causes of influence, not at its effects.

In my opinion, *thinking* like an influencer is the first and most important step to becoming an influential project manager. We do not need to sell our soul or clone our brain to become influential. We do not need to become someone else. We simply need to build on the best of who we already are.

Your Influence Is Not the Same with All People

I have observed that influence is very curious. Even though we can affect almost everyone around us, our level of influence is not the same with everyone. For example, when you have a meeting with your team members and you present an idea to them or make a suggestion, do they all respond in the same way? Of course not. One person may think all your ideas are inspired. Another may view everything you say with skepticism. You can identify which one you have influence with. On the other hand, the skeptic who resisted your idea may be more accepting if an executive presented it.

If you pay attention to people's responses to yourself and others, you can see that people respond to one another according to their level of influence. I consider influence like a specific application of influence. Influence does not come to us instantaneously; it grows by stages.

We are influenced by what we see. For instance, when my children were young no matter what I told them to do, their natural inclination was to imitate my behavior. Now they are adults and that does not happen anymore. Perhaps because when people are grown they do not need somebody with authority to move forward, that is, they do

not need the father's authority. For most people, if they believe that you are positive and trustworthy and have admirable qualities, they will seek you as an influencer in their lives. And the better they get to know you, the greater your credibility will be and the higher your influence can become if they like what they see. For example, when I deliver training sessions and workshops and I promise to share some information (e.g., exercises, templates, and examples) with the workshop attendees, after the workshop I send the promised information to them.

If you were to attend Project Management Institute (PMI) congresses, the people you meet there do not know you, and at first you have no influence with them at all. If someone they trust introduces you to them and gives you an endorsement, you can temporarily “borrow” some of that person's influence. It happened to me many years ago; let me share with you my story. I had published my first article in *PM Network* in 2002. It happened because Randall L. Englund, my best friend, who is an executive consultant, speaker, and author, lent me his influence when he introduced me to *PM Network* editor Ross Foti. Englund had a very good reputation as a book author. He had written several articles for *PM Network* and other magazines, and he is the author of five books in the project management field. Obviously I needed to get some columns published until I was recognized. People will assume that you are credible until they know you better. But as soon as they have some time to observe you, you either build or bust that influence by your actions. Some people are very influenced by the image a well-known person has because of the actions and attitudes they believe that person represents.

If you want to make a really significant impact on the lives of other people, you have to do it up close. And that brings you to the second level of influence: *motivating*. You motivate people when you encourage them and communicate with them on an emotional level. The process creates a bridge between you and them, and builds their confidence and sense of self-worth. For instance, I always encourage people at professional congresses to participate and present their experiences in front of others. I always tell people about my experience presenting my first paper on project management at an international congress and how the reaction of the attendees encouraged me to continue presenting.

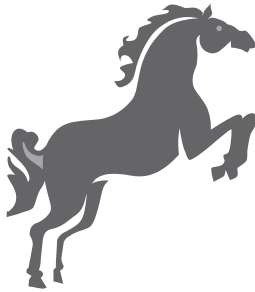
I consider *mentoring* the third level of influence. That means listening to people's needs and problems. You probably will not be able to solve their problems immediately but at least you can share similar experiences with them. Being positive is crucial. I am lucky because I have acted as a PMI mentor in the past, and I had experienced the issues and conflicts that arise in professional associations. The key is how to be an active listener. If you want to influence your mentees, then you need to effectively listen to them. Stop thinking and listen to them first, second, understand the issue or problem, third, think about alternatives, and finally, try to negotiate solutions.

The fourth level of influence is *multiplying*. The highest level of influence you can have in others' lives is the multiplication level. As a multiplying influencer, you help people you are influencing to become positive influencers in the lives of others, and pass on not only what they have received from you but also what they have learned and gleaned on their own. Few people ever make it to this influence level, but everyone has the potential to do so. You can be a model to the masses, but to go the higher levels of influence, you have to work with individuals. What you say and, more important, what you do are a model for those who follow you.

Positive influencers give value to other people. I don't know what kind of influence you have on others today as you read this book. Your actions may touch the lives of hundreds of people, or perhaps you may influence two or three team members or colleagues. The number of people is not what is most important. The key point is to remember that your level of influence is not static. Even if you have had a negative effect on others in the past, you can turn that around and make your impact a positive one. I want to help you become a project manager of high influence. You can have an incredibly positive impact on the lives of others. You can give a lot of value to them.

I don't know exactly what your dream is in life or what kind of legacy you want to leave. But if you want to make an impact, you will have to become a person capable of influencing others. As a project manager your destiny is learning from your mistakes when managing projects. My best advice for gaining influence is to know people more and more, learn from their reactions, and step by step you will learn about their reactions and you will be better prepared to influence them.

The Horse Story



For several years I have been telling my horse joke every time I need to convince somebody about the power of one's project management beliefs. Only when you believe in something can you sell it. I use this joke with my customers, colleagues, and peers. I try to give others my passion in telling the joke and I think I have shared it many times. However, I was not conscious about how I was influencing people when using that story over the years.

Many people remember me because of that joke; I think that means that I was able to influence them in some way. But let me tell it.

Let's imagine a gypsy who wants to sell a horse, and the gypsy says to a man: "I want to sell you a horse."

The man answers him: "I don't need any horse."

"Oh yes, you need it," says the gypsy. "You have some children and a wife. This horse wakes up very early in the morning, does all the housework, goes to the supermarket to do your shopping, and when you come back in the evening the meals are cooked. This is a fantastic horse. You need to buy it."

The man says: "I don't believe you, but I'll buy that horse."

Two months later the gypsy and the man meet each other again, and the man says to the gypsy: "That is an awful horse. It bothers my neighbors at 3:00 a.m. It kicks my children every day. I hate that horse. Please take away that horse."

The gypsy man smiles and says, "Continue talking about the horse that way and you will not be able to sell it again."

When I analyzed my story over the years, I discovered that I was influencing project managers' and executives' behaviors in my talks and presentations. Although the horse story is an example of persuasion, I always use it to demonstrate to project managers that they need to believe in their projects to be able to get the buy-in from executives. Every project is a "horse" you need to believe in, because if not, you cannot sell it to your customer or to the rest of the project stakeholders.

Persuasion consists of moving other people to voluntarily accept your point of view. Influence is the ability to exert power on somebody else. People who influence do not want to change attitudes, but people who persuade try to change them. I have become well known worldwide because of my positive attitude managing projects. What I learned is that every one of us influences people every day, but we are often not conscious of it. Remember, if you want to influence people, if you want to sell an idea or proposal to somebody, you need to prepare yourself (and the horse) if you want to be able to sell it.

Definitions

There are several definitions of influence. One is a power affecting a person, thing, or course of events, especially a power that operates without any direct or apparent effort. Influence may be also defined as the power to sway or affect based on prestige, wealth, ability, or position. Another definition is a determining factor, such as the positions of the stars and planets at the time of one's birth, which many believe affects an individual's tendencies and characteristics. A project manager needs to achieve results by influencing team members and stakeholders, and needs to develop that skill to be successful.

Influence versus Persuasion

Is the gypsy a persuader or an influencer? Persuasion is important but dangerous. If you persuade someone the wrong way, you lose influence. If the gypsy tries to sell a bad horse, he will lose his influence. We have all been victims of salespeople, colleagues, or bosses who use great persuasion techniques to make us do something we