

THE SCIENCE OF PERSUASION



R&D? REGULATORY? PRODUCTION? SALES & MARKETING? WHAT DO WE ALL HAVE IN COMMON? FROM DRUG DISCOVERY TO GETTING AGREEMENT TO PRESCRIBE WE ALL DEPEND ON THE WILLINGNESS AND COMMITMENT OF COLLEAGUES, SUPPLIERS AND CUSTOMERS TO HELP US ACHIEVE OUR GOALS. WHATEVER OUR ROLE, WE ALL NEED THE POWER OF PERSUASION AS ALISON MORRIS DISCOVERS.

Look up 'persuasion' in the thesaurus and you will find an interesting range of alternative words - inducement, bribery; temptation and enticement. Persuasion, however, is none of these. It is a skilled process of getting others to do what you want them to do, or to accept your point of view.

The process of persuasion takes many forms. However, no matter who you are talking to – your boss, spouse, child, subordinate, customer or supplier – your aim is to persuade others to do what you want done. This can mean an action or just the acceptance of your point of view.

Persuasiveness is one of the most common requirements for people in working life, whether you are presenting, selling, or attempting to get buy-in from another department for your plans. Although we may not consciously think about the skills we use, persuasion and influencing are key elements of our behaviour which will contribute to our success. Whatever your level in an organisation, you need to be able to influence the

people around you. Nobody today can rely on the power of their position alone.

However, people are often more aware of needing to plan a persuasive approach when they are applying it to the 'outside world' with customers, suppliers and potential clients as they sell or promote their products, services, image or solutions. So what stands in the way of successful persuasion?

As the persuader or the person on the receiving end, you may be able to pinpoint specific reasons. There are many ways in which people can fail to be persuasive. Everyone has at least one painful memory of spending ages fruitlessly trying to bring about a change of opinion in a friend or business contact.

Most then complain later to anyone who will listen: "He just wouldn't listen. Anyone could see it would've been a better solution, but he just wouldn't see reason." Comments like this are a good sign that the speaker has fallen into the most common trap

in persuasion: believing that because it seems like a good idea to them, others will see the value too.

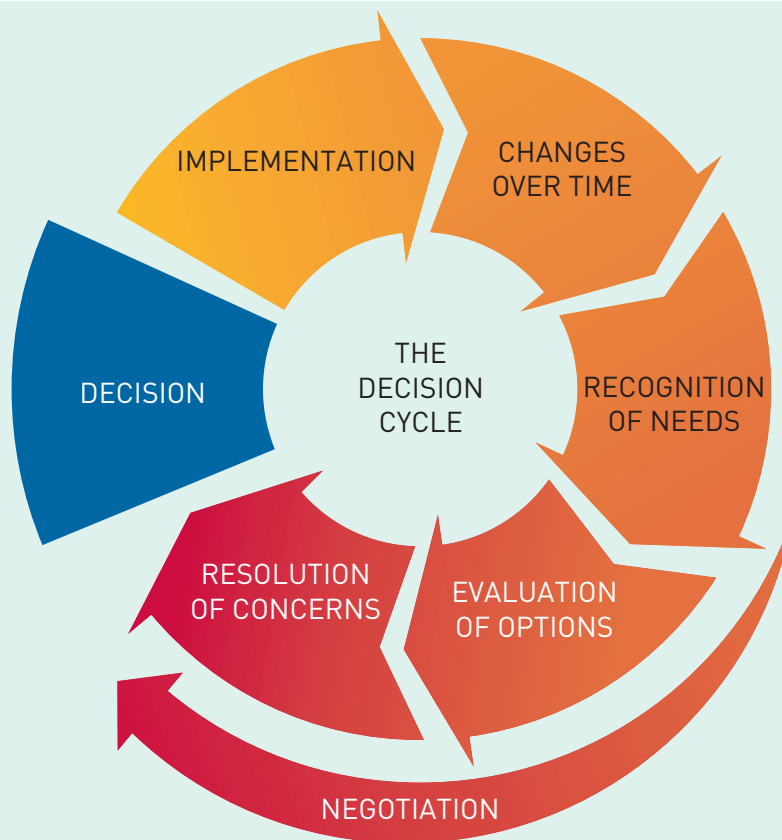
Years of research by Huthwaite International have yielded a maxim, which on first hearing can be difficult to accept: logic is not persuasive.

Once people have a firmly held view on an issue, even a string of 'good reasons' may not shift them if their gut reaction is that you are wrong. It is a well known psychological phenomenon that people with very firmly held views are amazingly creative in the ways in which they can discount or explain away contradictory evidence and thus maintain the consistency of their position.

Pushing and Pulling

Using an inappropriate style of persuasion is another way of gaining an unsuccessful result. For example, 'pushing' when you should be pulling'.

'Pushing' is characterised by a relatively low involvement from the person being persuaded. The



influencer concentrates on putting forward a course of action or viewpoint, backing it with plenty of reasons and arguments.

People often assume that the push style of persuasion is always aggressive, or that it is an unproductive way to communicate, but this is not always the case. It can be delivered aggressively but it can also be an enthusiastic presentation of an idea or approach, or it can be delivered quietly and deliberately.

The 'pull' style encourages greater involvement from the person being persuaded. The influencer uses questioning behaviour to invite the other party to consider the issues and generate solutions with which the influencer is happy.

Most of us know what it feels like to be on the receiving end of a very strong 'push' style. Yet used skilfully and at the right time, a 'push' style can be as effective as a 'pull' style. The key here is appropriate use of the behaviours rather than one way being right or wrong.

Table 1: Criteria for selecting the appropriate persuasion style

	Push	Pull
1. Consider the 'power' balance. Who has the power in the situation: you or the person who you are influencing? N.B. Power can be of position, expertise, personality or resources.	Works best with power	Works without power
2. Do you need to gain the commitment of the other party for your idea to be implemented successfully?	Risk of low commitment through low involvement	More chance of high commitment through high involvement
3. Do you need to regard your relationship with the other party as a long term one?	Can be more effective in short-term relationships	Can be more effective in long-term relationships
4. Has the decision already been taken, irrespective of the outcome of your discussion?	Reduces risk of resentment if the decision has been made	Can lead to resistance and frustration if it fails and the decision has been made anyway
5. Do you have only one possible outcome to aim for, or do you have room to manoeuvre?	Is more appropriate if you have no room to manoeuvre	Is more appropriate if you have room to manoeuvre

What may constitute successful and skilful persuasion at one phase will prove ineffective if it is applied when the decision maker has moved out of that phase

The third key pitfall is not having an influencing framework to help plan your strategy. Understanding your audience and being able to organise your argument will build your confidence and reap rewards leading to greater success in persuasion.

Effective influencers can use both 'push' and 'pull' strategies. They simply select the appropriate style for a given person, topic and situation (table 1).

As well as thinking about the situation, you also need to consider the size of the decision being made and the person or people being persuaded. The art of effective persuasion involves being able to adapt to the perspective of the person being persuaded: the decision-maker.

Psychologically this means that it is important to understand how people go about making a decision to change, particularly a major or complex decision. Research suggests there is a series of discrete phases, which characterise decision-making. Each phase requires a different approach by the persuader.

So, what may constitute successful and skilful persuasion at one phase will prove ineffective if it is applied when the 'decision maker' has moved out of that phase. The model above relates principally to the buyer-seller decision-making cycle, but the lessons apply in other non-commercial contexts.

Understanding this decision-making cycle is a crucial part of the strategic planning process in the overall campaign to influence. It will help to set realistic objectives, plan your approach, the medium you choose and the timing of your efforts.

The importance of possessing the right influencing skills extends beyond the explicitly recognised buyer-seller setting. Within the pharmaceutical industry we need to be effective in influencing not only our external

customers but our colleagues, internal and external departments, suppliers and other crucial players in our complex world.

Whoever we are trying to influence, practised skills will always get better results. Within organisations, persuasion and influencing skills have an increasingly important place in any individual's skill-set, regardless of their position.

Now, more than ever, there is a need to be able to persuade people at all levels. Use of freelancers, interim staff, and people drawn from different departments to form multifunctional teams is changing the nature of many working environments in pharma and weakening many of the 'command' bonds that may have been relied upon previously.

The further you progress in your chosen career the more likely it is that you will be expected to present your own ideas and those of others. Developing effective persuasion skills, and approaching influencing strategically, are a valuable addition to the armoury of interpersonal communication skills needed in today's internal and external pharma workplace.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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