



Obtain cooperation without using authority

Let's break down organizational silos! Reinforce lateral collaboration! Treat our suppliers like partners! These are common watchwords today as companies seek ways to improve their performance and responsiveness. Those furthest along this path have taken proactive measures to create a favorable environment by establishing a shared vision and common objectives, creating mutual dependency across business units and promoting lateral career moves, etc.

There is nothing natural about lateral collaboration. Creating a mutual sense of reciprocity takes effort.

But even in such contexts – which are rare – getting cooperation from peers or employees outside one's formal scope of authority is no piece of cake.

Indeed, even with the best intentions in the world, there are some objective obstacles to lateral collaboration:

Antagonistic objectives and constraints

Although the individual parts of a company may be well aware that they are ultimately working toward the same goal, they each have their own priorities and constraints. Customer service, for example, may set a rule to satisfy all customer requests within 48 hours, even if this means it must sometimes put off compiling statistical data requested by the marketing department in peak periods, while knowing that this data will help improve customer satisfaction. Indeed, collaborative arrangements go beyond the theoretical objectives of the concerned parties and **reconcile their immediate operational constraints**.

Unbalanced relationships

Collaboration is rarely a perfect balance in which all constituents contribute equally. In fact, the reverse is generally true, that is, one party needs another's resources to realize a given project without having anything to offer immediately in return. When this happens, collaborative goodwill is sorely

put to the test. Indeed, if people suspect they are being taken for granted or exploited, as soon as a conflict of interest arises, they will put their own interests first or demand compensation for efforts hitherto given freely. To make lateral collaboration work, one must therefore **establish mutually supportive and trusting relationships**.

A complicated social legacy

Most requests for collaboration do not come out of the clear blue sky. They are part of a longstanding, complex legacy that frequently extends far beyond those directly concerned. For example, the marketing department at one company noticed that R&D refused to provide any support at all. It turned out that several years previously, the marketing department head had asked R&D to share ongoing developments, and then took advantage of this information to claim paternity of a particularly clever invention. Since then, R&D had refused to respond to any requests from marketing, even though the leadership had since changed! Having an objective interest in cooperating is not enough; one must also **remove relationship roadblocks that can stand in the way of addressing substantive issues**.

To get the collaboration they need, lateral leaders must...

- 1 Adopt a partnership mindset
- 2 Integrate the objectives of the other constituents
- 3 Identify suitable currencies of exchange
- 4 Manage the perceived balance of the relationship
- 5 Cultivate quality relationships

First key driver

Adopt a **partnership** mindset

Remember

To encourage people to listen constructively to your requests:

- **Think in terms of making allies.**
Rather than asking yourself, "How can I convince this person to give me what I want?," ask "What would make this person want to support me?"
- **If your request is greeted unenthusiastically, tackle the issue head-on.**
Don't pretend the problem doesn't exist. Acknowledge it; then focus on discussing your mutual needs and constraints and why you should work together on the initiative in question.

To move fast or avoid haggling, managers often stress why their requests are legitimate, e.g. "This project was launched by the president, so please give me someone to help me with it." However, regardless of the weight of authority behind the request, **the quality of collaboration depends on large and small efforts made over time.** This takes more than just superficial agreement. It is consequently important not to force people's hands by insisting that your request is mandatory, but rather to **treat them as potential allies to be wooed and won.**

This approach is even more critical in contexts where relationships are

tense, and where there may be a strong temptation to be authoritatively brusque. Under such conditions, the authors of *Influence Without Authority* point out the importance of moving away from the interpersonal sphere

– e.g. asking a favor, asserting your rights, etc. – to **focus on the basic issues** at stake. Why is collaboration needed? What are

the advantages for the respective parties? What might happen if collaboration fails? **Pragmatically and constructively** integrating the respective needs of those involved is the best way to build objective alliances and overcome interpersonal conflicts.

In the absence of authority, collaboration requires voluntary consent on all sides.

"You will have influence insofar as you can give people what they need."

Influence Without Authority, Allan R. Cohen, David L. Bradford, Wiley.

Second key driver

Integrate the objectives of the other constituents

Tips

How to identify what another person values?

- **Analyze what you know about the person's situation from a tactical perspective** to identify some assumptions to test.
- **Talk with people who work with the individual in question** to refine your understanding of the latter's needs and constraints.
- **Talk openly with the person** to discuss the topic at hand as directly as possible.
- **Read between the lines** by paying attention to terms or issues that pop up repeatedly in conversation, as these tend to indicate what is currently on the person's mind.

Collaborative roadblocks are easily blamed on bad will or a lack of discernment or comprehension of the stakes. Things are often more complex in reality, however. Organizational sociology shows that seemingly absurd or capricious antagonism is often quite logical on an individual level. Even more than personality, the context in which people operate influences individual behavior. For example, a project director sitting in headquarters might consider that a regional manager has absolutely no good reason to refuse to carry out a given request. Yet, if the regional manager in question has doubts concerning the importance of this particular corporate initiative in the eyes of the local hierarchy, or is occupied with several other projects at the same time, his lukewarm response becomes very easy

to understand. Trying to **consider requests from the other guy's perspective** is consequently a critical first step in understanding the situation.

Then, based on this understanding, adapt your request to the needs and constraints of the other person. For example, you could **ask a third party for assistance**, e.g. by having the local hierarchy make the request or get support from other influential players. Another option would be to **adapt the content of your request**. For instance, you could ask an overworked colleague to provide feedback on a few key points rather than participating fully in a work group. In lateral management situations, adapting your requests to suit the needs and constraints of others will dramatically increase your chances of getting what you need.

Before requesting help, put yourself in the other guy's shoes.

Third key driver

Identify suitable currencies of exchange

Lasting collaboration depends on finding suitable arrangements. To influence people effectively, not only must you understand what they value, but also **what resources you possess that could serve as a suitable currency of exchange**.

Some such currencies come easily to mind, such as access to financial, human or material resources. Another classic move is to offer your official support for a decision. However, the leverage that can be gained from small initiatives is often underestimated.

Be aware that some **measures which may seem trivial at first glance – because easy to provide – may actually be highly valued by others**. For example, an offer to provide timely market intelligence or facilitate introductions to carefully chosen connections may be highly appreciated.

You should also ask yourself what negative currencies you possess, provided

that you are careful not to undermine the relationship with perceived threats. For example, to obtain support from a manager who fears that his unit will be forced to contribute to a pilot project with no added value, argue that you will weigh the pros and cons carefully and objectively before including his department in your proposal to the steering committee.

There are often more ways to influence people than you think.

When you don't have a direct currency of exchange or are reluctant to use the ones you do have, another solution is to **leverage support from third parties**. Who has resources or political clout that matter to the other person? Could you use your connections to intercede on the other person's behalf? You will have many more options if you attempt to balance the sum total of your exchanges with others over time, rather than trying in vain to balance each individual arrangement.

Remember

To identify your currencies of exchange:

- Consider not only material resources, but also social and psychological dimensions that may be valued by the other person.
- Play simultaneously on what the other person wants to obtain – i.e. positive currencies – and wants to avoid – i.e. negative currencies.
- Think beyond the individual to integrate what the person's team, boss, or department wants, etc.

Multiple drivers of influence

Allan R. Cohen and David L. Bradford distinguish five main types of currency that can be used to encourage lateral collaboration.

WHAT THE OTHER PERSON WANTS	CORRESPONDING DRIVERS OF INFLUENCE
Professional achievement	e.g.: Give the other person an opportunity to achieve something that appeals to his or her professional pride or ethical values; propose to have him or her join teams assigned to think about topics important to him or her.
Greater efficiency	e.g.: Provide access to scarce resources (money, equipment, skills, time); share certain types of information with him or her first; support his or her decisions to top management.
Professional advancement	e.g.: Give him or her a chance to learn, get to know key decision makers better, forge a reputation, make more connections, etc.
Better interpersonal relationships	e.g.: Provide signs of recognition; publicly thank and congratulate the person; facilitate the person's integration in teams and networks.
Organizational flexibility	e.g.: Facilitate personal arrangements like telecommuting; help a creative individual or a researcher avoid red tape; etc.

Based on *Influence Without Authority*, Allan R. Cohen, David L. Bradford, Wiley.

Fourth key driver

Manage the **perceived balance** of the relationship

Remember

The sense that a relationship is fair is essentially a matter of perception.

To manage this balance:

- **Take the time to discuss shared projects** to ensure that each side is aware of the respective efforts and value created by the other.
- **Try to be frank and objective**, and don't overestimate your own efforts or underestimate the value you receive, as this is rarely a good policy in the long term. It is a better idea to create climate in which the respective parties feel they have a realistic idea of the fairness of the arrangement.
- **Listen actively**, because what counts is how people perceive the efforts made and the value received. Be careful not to get too attached to preconceived notions.

To collaborate effectively, people must feel that their respective efforts will be fairly rewarded. In the absence of this perceived balance, people may lose the motivation to continue engaging as soon as problems arise. However, this equilibrium is difficult to manage. First, because people naturally tend to see the efforts they themselves are making more easily than the efforts made by the other side. Second, because a fair balance can never be struck precisely, due to natural disparities among the respective contributions. The point is thus to **ensure that the parties to the relationship have the impression that they are getting their fair share**, despite the inevitable asymmetry.

The best way to do this is to **cultivate**

long-term relationships to facilitate acceptance of temporary imbalances. To manage this equilibrium over time, **respective debits and credits must be clearly established**. The contributing parties must clarify their respective efforts, which may not be obvious from

others' point of view. Saying something like, "If I put this topic on the agenda, I'll have to put off something else," will make the other person aware of an effort that

might otherwise have gone unnoticed. By the same token, a statement like, "I know this report will take you three days," is equivalent to an admission of indebtedness, which is extremely helpful in conveying the message that the speaker intends to return the favor one day.

The sense of mutual commitment is reinforced when all constituents feel they have something to gain.

Some tips to manage the perceived fairness of the arrangement

1

Don't hesitate to **"think aloud"** to clarify the effort required.
e.g.: "To give you this data so far in advance, I'll have to make the analyses earlier and push back other commitments."

2

If the arrangement is imbalanced, show that you are **aware you are indebted** to the other side.
e.g.: "I know that what I'm asking represents a lot more work for you, but I won't forget it."

3

Don't forget to validate **what may or may not be explicitly stated** in your organization.
e.g.: If your organization values direct arrangements, use phrases like "in exchange"; otherwise, prefer less direct formulas.

Fifth key driver

Cultivate **quality relationships**

Remember

Some tactics to build your store of credit by making people indebted to you:

- **Don't underplay what your efforts cost you**. Saying, "I hope that helped you," is better than "It was nothing," which minimizes the effort expended and thus gains you less credit.
- **Maintain your "capital of influence."** Make yourself available for small favors. This will lay the groundwork for the day you need support.
- **Always keep in mind that you might need the other person's support some day**. Don't let relationships get to the breaking point. Leave room for people to turn you down gracefully, or break off discussions rather than letting things deteriorate.

Although people must have an objective interest in wanting to collaborate, **the lasting success of the arrangement depends primarily on the quality of interpersonal relationships**.

Open and transparent communication is the best way to find common ground, thanks to a good understanding of what the participants

truly value. What is more, trusting relationships greatly accelerate the collaborative process, because each party expects the other will do the right thing despite residual areas of haziness. And this circle is virtuous, because lateral

collaboration is an excellent opportunity to develop quality relationships and trust.

One highly effective way to build your store of credit with others is to

be proactive in cultivating their sense of indebtedness to you.

The most influential leaders are careful to extend their networks

regularly, cultivate existing connections and do small favors for people whenever possible. Those who feel indebted to you are more likely to respond favorably when you ask them for help because they will want to "return the favor."

The interpersonal dimension plays a critical role in effective collaboration.