INFLUENCE

Living in the Matrix:
How to Survive and Thrive

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THE INFLUENCE GURU

Matrix organizations free up information and harvest cross-functional innovation, but they are complex to navigate. Getting things done takes preparation and influence.

No, not the science fiction film, though there may be days when you feel like a player in a virtual reality simulation. Matrix organizations are those in which people report horizontally to a team or project leader and vertically to a functional manager. The advantages include a freer flow of information where it's needed and often a more democratic, team-based leadership style. Matrix organizations can avoid the internal competitiveness and rigidity of silos and harvest innovation through the diversity of cross-functional teams. That's the good news. The bad? Matrix organizations are complex, can be confusing to navigate, and are challenging to manage.

In a traditionally structured organization, it's fairly easy to determine the power and decision structure – even though there are often informal ways to get things done that bypass the accepted route. Working across functional boundaries in a matrix organization can be as tricky as working across national or ethnic boundaries—the marketing, sales, manufacturing, and finance cultures can be as different as Latin cultures are from those of Asia, Africa, or Nordic countries. The strategy, goals, and reward systems of different functional areas may be conflicting, even though their representatives are working on the same team or project.

Getting things done in a matrix organization requires clarity of purpose, a well-developed network, and a solid set of influence skills. Where formal power isn't the rule, you need to depend on your ability to send and receive messages that have a powerful impact and move your intentions into action.

Instead of taking advantage of your own positional power, or having your manager call the other's manager, getting big things done in a matrix organization requires thoughtful preparation. What's the action you want to see (and why do you want it to happen)? Who is in a position to take the action (and what's your relationship with them)? How can I influence this person or these people to commit to the action (and do I have the skills and knowledge to do so)?

The what and why

- What's your influence objective? If you don't know what action you want someone to take, you won't know if you've succeeded – or what alternative will work.
- Why do you want someone to take the action? What's the deeper purpose? What need of yours or your team's is driving you? If you're not clear about that, you can't be flexible and open to alternative actions that may meet that need nearly or equally as well.

The who

- How well do you understand how things really get done in your matrix organization? Where are the important decisions made? Who is empowered to take the kind of action you're looking for? If you don't know, how can you find out?
- What kind of influence relationship do you have or must you build with the people or person who can take the action? If it's not strong, how can you strengthen it? If it doesn't exist, who can connect you? If it's unlikely that it could be strong, who do you know and trust who could influence them in the direction you would like to see?

The how

- How much do you know about the other's goals, values, concerns, and vested interests? What do you know about how their function works – its strategy, structure, values, goals, and priorities? To what degree are you and your team aligned with the others on the larger issues related to your "ask"? How can you reframe your idea or request so that it is better aligned with their priorities? To what degree can you support them in achieving other goals? This will be the content you have to work with as an influencer.
- What are the messages you want to send that will help move the other to action (expressive influence)? What is the information you want to gain or the alignment that you want to achieve that will stimulate the other to take the action (receptive influence)? This will help you to develop a balanced process for approaching others and following through to gain the influence results you desire.

My first experience with a matrix organization was in the early 1980s in a large research laboratory. Over the past 35 years, more and more organizations have moved in that cross-functional direction, but issues related to communication, direction, performance evaluation, and other processes remain stubbornly difficult to solve. Becoming a "matrix maven" isn't easy, but the trend is clearly toward more complexity and flexibility. Your ability to influence – to listen, learn, align, stimulate, enlighten, excite, inspire, and create impact will help you to navigate the organizations of the present and the future.

B. Kim Barnes is the author of Exercising Influence: Making Things Happen at Work, at Home, and In Your Community (3rd edition, John Wiley & Sons, 2015) and primary developer of Exercising Influence: Building Relationship and Getting Results (Barnes & Conti Associates,Inc).

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Founder of **The Influence Guru**, Kim Barnes is a coach, facilitator, and author with more than forty years of experience in leadership, influence, and organization development. She was a founder and, for many years, CEO of Barnes & Conti Associates, and developed or co-developed programs including *Exercising Influence*, *Inspirational Leadership*, *Intelligent Risk-Taking*, *Consulting on the Inside*, and *Managing Innovation*. She is the author of six books, including *Exercising Influence* (Wiley) and *Building Better Ideas* (Berrett-Koehler). She works with enterprise companies, government agencies, small businesses, and individuals from the San Francisco Bay Area.

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